
PURPLE & ORANGE?
DUPLICATE
no. 19

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IN MEMORIAM: SPACE SHUTTLE #25

As we prepare this Issue #19 of PURPLE & ORANGE? for publication, word comes to us of the terrible tragedy at Cape Canaveral, Florida. Like so many millions of others around the world, we watch the tapes of Challenger's violent end, and we mourn.

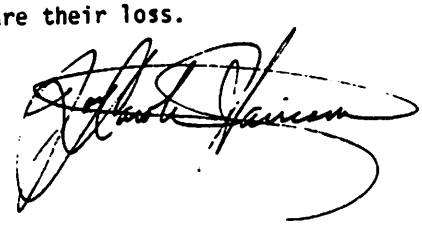
While we have never been a great fan of the space shuttle, feeling as we do that it has drawn too much time and too many resources from what we as an astronomer consider far more immediate scientific endeavours, we nevertheless have always seen it as a vital step in mankind's exploration of the universe. Perhaps other steps should have come first; perhaps other programs should have had priority. But we firmly believe the stars represent our destiny, and if we do not strive for them, our race must eventually be doomed to extinction, trapped as we are now on the surface of one small planet.

Our time to reach for the stars is all too short. Mission Commander Francis "Dick" Scobee, Air Force test pilot, on his second shuttle flight; mission pilot Michael J. Smith, experienced naval aviator; Air Force Major Ellison S. Onizuka, mission specialist and shuttle veteran; mission specialist Ronald E. McNair, expert in laser physics; payload specialist Gregory Jarvis, Air Force veteran skilled in satellite design and fluid mechanics; mission specialist Judith A. "J.R." Resnick, design and biomedical engineer; and Sharon Christa McAuliffe, social studies teacher from Concord, New Hampshire, intended to be the first "ordinary citizen" in space...

We cannot help but be reminded of an earlier tragedy, and of the three men -- Virgil "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White, and Roger B. Chaffee -- who died in a flash fire aboard the Apollo 1 command module that fateful day in January of 1967. Like those three astronauts nineteen years and one day ago, the men and women of Challenger's crew have shared our beliefs, our hopes, and our dreams for the future. For them, now, that future will never be.

And so we grieve -- not only for the tremendous loss to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the manned program as a whole, not only for the loss to a world so badly in need these days of true, legitimate heroes -- but also for the loss of seven brave explorers, seven seekers of knowledge, who have shared our dream and who, had they lived, would have helped to make it a reality.

Our hearts go out to their families. We share their grief. We share their loss.



They shall not grow old
as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning
We will remember them.

--- "For the Fallen" (Stanza Four), by Laurence Binyon

FROM THE EDITOR: SOME THOUGHTS ON CHALLENGER

January 28, 1986.
In memory --

Gregory Jarvis
Sharon Christa McAuliffe
Ronald McNair
Ellison Onizuka
Judy Resnik
Francis Scobee
Mike Smith

You are the Challengers. You knew the risks, and you took them gladly, even eagerly.

May we honour your memories in a fitting fashion.

We had planned a cheerful, upbeat editorial introducing your new editor, but that seems a bit difficult even to consider, on the day after Challenger's place in the history books was secured with tragedy. Shock, grief, rage, numbness... After six or eight hours of watching the rerun videotape of a fireball in a blue Florida sky, hearing speculation about how it could have happened, listening to continuous expressions of horror in every interview from every reporter, we suspect there's not much we could add. We don't know why it happened, technically or philosophically. Every expression of grief or regret starts to sound like a tired cliché.

"No one knows why it happened. Here is speculation from someone who may, or may not, know what he's talking about. NASA will investigate. We are shocked at the magnitude of this tragedy. Here is a replay of the shuttle launch, for those who might have missed it earlier in the day. We have an interview from x-many years ago with one of the heroic astronauts..."

What it all means is, seven men and women are dead, people who wanted to go into space, as many of us must desire, or science fiction wouldn't be one of our primary loves.

Some of us, the younger ones, grew up with space flight as a reality. We read Asimov, and Herbert, and Clarke and the rest, and we took it for granted that humans would of course wander the stars, almost untninkingly. We remember clearly the first steps on the moon, if little else from the Apollo years. That was the dream of President Kennedy, and the promise to us of an expanding future. The shuttle project began, and our excitement grew -- at last we had our Enterprise for space, even if she wasn't the one to take our dreams into heaven. NASA's budget, not the potential for trouble in space, loomed larger after that. So many projects shelved, seemingly with little public interest... We had Columbia -- maybe our other hopes would be fulfilled, some day, the space stations, and the L-5 colonies, and the cities on the moon, and all the rest. We moved slowly toward our dreams, but we still moved. The space shuttle, after twenty-four more-or-less successful missions, became almost commonplace.

Almost.

Technically, mechanically, it takes a lot of work to get a shuttle into space, or any spacecraft, for that matter. It's an alien environment, cold and barren, by our demanding standards of what constitutes "necessity." For us to survive, we have to take everything with us. Precautions have to be taken here, for us to live out there. Sometimes we miscalculate, or overlook something that can become a problem. The most extensive testing misses a weakness or flaw that only actual use pushes beyond its limit. We think we've planned for every possibility, and something still goes wrong. We discover our back-up systems and precautions left a little hole. A jealous Earth isn't always eager to let her children go.

We're human. Impatient. Curious. Easily challenged. We can imagine things, even if we can't see them, and then want what we've imagined. Material goods. Dreams. God-and-country. If we want them badly enough, we work for them. Sometimes we die for them. That seems to be the ultimate test of how much we want or believe in something, if we're willing to die for it.

Yesterday, seven people did.

They didn't plan it that way, of course. Those seven men and women didn't just lose their lives in a space disaster. They gave their lives freely to a dream of space, dedicating themselves to a lot of hard work -- sometimes with little to show for it, and no public acclaim. They believed in a future in space, and were willing to make their own minor contribution to it, every day, with every experiment and every mission. They worked for the dream, as well as died for it. They were willing to do what was necessary to see the dream continue -- after all, where in space do we say, we've gone far enough, we've seen it all? We think that's what we have to remember, and learn, from them. It's easy to dream. You only die once. But to spend your life working for a goal, without fame, fortune, and glory...

Yes, we honour the lost, and mourn with their families and friends. But we support the other survivors, too -- the astronauts who weren't part of this mission, who have to face their own fears next time; the NASA technicians who watched the disaster, stunned and helpless to intervene; and the men and women who now have to discover what went wrong, and prevent it from happening again, under the glare of a public demand for immediate and simple answers. They've all got a big job, too, and we likely won't hear much about it.

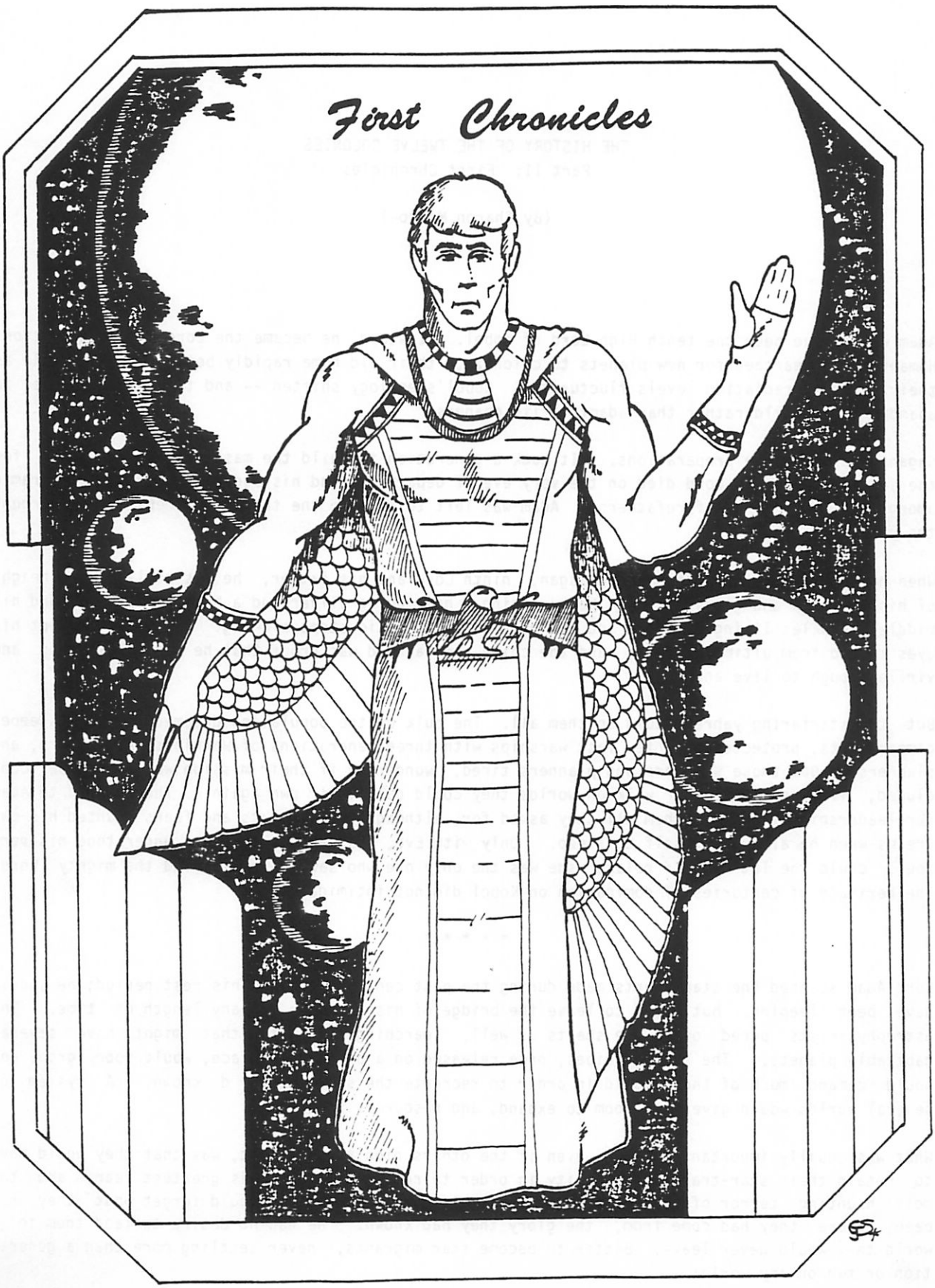
Enterprise has its place in the Smithsonian. Columbia, Discovery, and Atlantis may still lift off into the heavens, and NASA will do its best to ensure their continued safe journeys. Challenger is gone.

But never forgotten. She stands with Apollo I, and several Russian craft. To our sorrow, three astronauts and four cosmonauts have new companions.

We wonder if the guys wolf-whistled when the gals walked in. Maybe the ladies whistled back. Irreverent? Yes. But we're counting on their sense of humour. These men and women grew up watching the advances of the space program, seeing technology and society change faster and faster, and they weren't afraid to be part of it. And we can't help but feel that school teachers and astronauts know how to take care of themselves, given half a chance, wherever they are.

Sharon Monroe

Sharon Monroe
Editor
PURPLE AND ORANGE?


First Chronicles

THE HISTORY OF THE TWELVE COLONIES
Part II: First Chronicles

(By Sharon Monroe)

Adam would have been the tenth High Lord of Kobol. Instead, he became the Lord of the Migration. Humanity had searched for new planets to colonize; their old home rapidly became uninhabitable as their star's radiation levels fluctuated. Kobol's ecology shifted -- and the humans chose to abandon their world rather than adapt to its changes.

Sagan had begun the preparations. It took a generation to build the massive ships and plan for the journey. The old Lord died on the very eve of departure, and his body was buried in a pyramid among the tombs of his forefathers. Adam was left to take up the task he'd prepared for through the yahrens.

When he took up the dream from Lord Sagan, ninth Lord and his father, he was still at the height of his strength and glory. Now, he was aging, hair going silver and a bulge growing around his middle, wrinkles lining his face and his previously athletic steps slowing. A young wife kept his eyes turned from ultimate death, and the child she carried was proof that he was still young and virile enough to live and rule.

But the starfaring yahrens told on them all. The bulk of the population dreamed in their sleeper compartments, protected by a few fast warships with three generations of Warriors, navigators, and planners. But those Warriors and planners tired, wondering if their mission would ever be concluded, if they would ever walk on worlds they could call their own again. They looked to Adam for leadership. He gave them all they asked for, although their doubts and fears haunted his own dreams when he allowed himself to sleep. Only with Eve, his second wife, who understood his very soul, could he let himself relax; she was the only one who saw the man behind the mighty Lord. The heritage of centuries of domination on Kobol did not intimidate her.

* * * * *

Lord Adam scanned the star charts made during the past centars. It was his rest period; he should have been sleeping, but hated to leave the bridge of his flagship for any length of time. The astrophysicists pored over the sheets as well, searching for a star that might have several habitable planets. The Twelve Tribes, once released on a planet's surface, would soon grow, and would demand much of their world in order to recreate the society they'd known. A system of several worlds would give them room to expand, and resources to exploit.

What was equally important to Adam, even if the others didn't realize it, was that they would have to retain their star-travelling ability in order to remain united. His greatest fear, and the most haunting terror of his dreams, was that his human descendants would forget what they had been, where they had come from, the glory they had known. He had no desire to lead them to a world they would never leave. Better to become star migrants, never settling more than a generation or two on any world!

At least we've left the blackness of the Void behind. That starless sea sapped our sanity and purpose as if it were created by some cruel god to keep us bound to Kobol, to quarantine us from the rest of the galaxy. We are long and well through that...!

Smooth, slender fingers rested on his shoulder. He glanced blearily at the dark-haired woman, and found a smile to answer the concern in her amber eyes. As the long yahrens passed, he'd won himself a young wife to stand beside him.

"Have you found anything?" Eve asked, low-voiced. There were those among the aristocratic crew who disapproved of her low status -- her family was priestly, not noble. She preferred avoiding them, especially now, when they stared at her growing belly as if outraged that she dared to give the Lord a child. Even her loose robes had ceased to conceal the baby.

Her husband shook his head wordlessly, then gestured for one of the men in the room to take the charts. Rising from his seat, he took her hand and led her away from the bustling archival chamber. The men and women buzzed respectfully around them, giving the royal couple privacy.

"Nothing," Adam said restlessly.

"Surely there must be stars with planets..."

"Not for us." He relished her dark beauty and glowing eyes, finding delight in the extra curves pregnancy had given her. "We need more than just one planet; we need enough space to expand as our population grows. I have to plan for the future as well as the present. Not every star has worlds we can use; many of the ones that do are already inhabited, and I won't displace another race, however primitive, because our own sun can no longer support us."

She lowered her gaze. "I was born the day before we left Kobol," she murmured softly. "And now, I carry a child of my own. I had hoped she would be born in our new home..."

"You are still so certain it will be a girl?"

She laughed demurely. "Of course, my Lord!" she replied impishly. "If I had known you so desperately wanted a son..."

"No!" He smiled at her teasing. "I already love our child, male or female, and have no doubt it will be as gifted as its parents. Three sons and a daughter already grown -- how will I learn to speak gibberish again? Such a difficulty you're proving to be!" A shadow passed over his face. One of the sons, his beloved Cain, was already gone, lost somewhere in the Void, engaged in pursuing his own mad dream.

"You had no such complaints when you learned Seth was making you a grandfather!" she retorted quickly, driving away the dark thoughts. "I'm sure you'll relearn how to speak to a child."

"Our child." His fondness and pride were evident in the barely contained smile and crinkled eyes. "Well, my Eve, I will do my best to find a suitable planet for this daughter to call home. But I think you should be resting, or did I mishear the physician's orders?"

She made a face and turned to leave, moving as fast as her unwieldy body would allow. He felt fiercely protective of her as she walked; when he caught one of the technicians curling his lip to give her a scornful, disdaining glance, he vowed the young man would find himself pulling extra shifts for the insult. Eve will be treated as my Lady!

"Lord Adam?"

"What is it, navigator?" he demanded with all the arrogant majesty at his command.

"Another chart has been updated, my lord, based on calculations of Lord Seth and Captain Feraia."

"I'll take it." Scowling, he swept up the armful of star charts and tapes, and stalked to the entrance portal. "Send more to my cabin as they're completed," he ordered the hapless Ensign. "I concentrate better without constant interruptions and the din of ceaseless chatter!"

The crewman, barely more than a boy, was quaking in his boots. "Yes, my lord. I'll bring them to you personally, if you wish it..."

"I do," he snapped curtly, and left.

* * * * *

Sectons passed, and still Adam had found no system suitable for the humans to colonize. Considering the long voyage they'd already endured, he began to wonder if he'd failed his father's dream. Sagan had seemed so sure the last time they spoke, before he died, that the children of Kobol would find a new home...

Even Cain -- the grief still struck deeply -- even Cain had shared the dream. In the words he left his father, hidden among Sagan's memoirs, histories, and perceptions, he told of travelling his own patn, of seeking another world and destiny for the Thirteenth Tribe. But he foresaw that the Twelve, too, would find worlds of promise, for many yahrens.

Adam wished he could be as sure. But he doubted himself, and the doubts grew as the days passed. Where would he find what his people so desperately needed? How long would they be content to follow him, when no end to their journey manifested itself?

The Lord shook his head and looked away from his fruitless study. Eve was already asleep, and he considered joining her, abandoning the quest for the night. But he knew his dreams would be haunted by his failure.

He sighed, and chose to spend a few moments on meditation first.

* * * * *

"Umm...Adam?" Eve stirred uneasily, and manoeuvred herself to her feet. "You've spent the night at work again!" she reproved as she turned off the lamp and gathered the scattered charts.

The man sitting so stiffly on the mat made no response.

"Adam?" With careful grace, she sat next to him, nudged his shoulders and called his name again. "Adam!"

His green eyes were closed, and his face was slack, expressionless. His skin was cool, too cool to her fingers, and she could scarcely detect breathing.

"My Lord!" she wailed. "Adam!"

He slumped to the floor.

* * * * *

Light gleamed everywhere, with no discernible source or variation of luminousity. The man stared at the shimmering visions walking through that light; they nodded at him as they passed, those that appeared to notice him at all. Their faces were veiled in gossamer; only their Void-dark eyes showed, blazing with sombre purpose. What little expression he could detect in them was not cruel, or even disturbed at his sudden presence; they simply accepted his being there, and moved tranquilly about him.

"Adam of Kobol."

He turned in wonder at the voice calling his name. It sounded gentle; its image was as gleaming as the others. Unlike those others, it didn't hurry smoothly from his sight toward some unkown destination; its attention focussed solely on him. The being extended a hand: he reached for it, but touched nothing.

"What...?" he gaped in shock and awe.

"I am sorry. I meant merely to gesture you on, not to frighten you, Adam. Come. This is the way you must follow." The voice was rich, kind, and left an impression in his mind that he yearned to hear always. It echoed through his soul, reassuring him, but raising a deep fear as well.

"Who are you?" His voice sounded strange, somehow...younger. In the brilliant sheen of something around him, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection. "That...!"

"Yes, it is you, Adam. It is the expression of your spirit in our dimension. Come, the chosen one of us waits to speak to you."

"Your dimension?"

"We have come to help our children in their quest. We know your need. We wish to help, and we have much to tell you, Adam of Kobol."

He followed mutely as the glowing being flowed before him.

"Have I died, then?" he finally found the courage to ask. They'd walked a long way, he thought, and it was strange that he wasn't out of breath, as he should have been from such a distance. "Are you creatures of the dead, angels or demons? Is this heaven, or hell? I know I am old, but I had hoped to finish the dream, to see my daughter's birth..."

He felt strangely calm at the thought of death, regretting what he'd left undone, but accepting that the best of any man's plans could be upset by the very fact of his race's mortality.

"Your spirit is strong," the being told him. "You are not dead yet, Adam. You have much time before you pass to that other plane. We are not angels, as you think of them, nor are we demons. We are...like you, but of another time and place."

"Why do you wish to help us? Why do you care about humans?"

"You will see, in time. He is here."

"He?"

"One of us. You will come to know him well, and your descendants also. We have aided you before, young one, and we will continue to help you until we stand together."

A second form of flowing light flared gloriously into existence before him. Adam felt its touch reach into his soul, and almost wept for that transcendant beauty and majesty. A sudden urge to kneel was gently shunted aside as comprehension of its being enveloped him.

"Do not kneel to me; our kind are far from gods. We merely offer our knowledge and aid to those who freely accept it, who choose a certain path."

The man nodded silently. For my people, I accept. Let me be worthy.

* * * * *

Seth stood rigidly on the command deck of Adam's warship. His father should have been there, but he lay in the medical bay, silent and unmoving. His stepmother Eve, heavy and near term, waited beside his bed, hollow-eyed from two sleepless nights.

Are the people of Kobol mine now? The responsibility was awesome. He was fifty-one, old enough for the task, but uncertain... Watching the flow of people through the cramped and crowded chamber, he wondered again if he had what was necessary to be a leader, to save these refugees from a dying world and give them new hope.

What choice is there? I must assume the responsibility, and lead them. Adam might not survive. Though he blunder blindly without the vision of the Elder Lords, he knew his duty -- to somehow fulfill his people's hopes.

He heard a sound of disbelief, and turned, then gasped in shock.

Adam stood before him, staring with some wild fire flickering in his eyes. Eve was beside her husband, smiling almost insanely. There was no tremor to the old man, no sign of weakness or illness. "I'll take over here now, Seth. Thank you for your stewardship of the Tribes." The old Lord's voice was strong, too much so for a man who'd been unconscious for over two days.

"Father...!" Seth stammered.

Fanaticism gleamed anew in Adam's eyes, reaching out to touch the young man's soul. Seth drew back in awe. What happened to you, Father? You look as though you've talked with the gods themselves, and survived to tell of it!

Then Adam smiled. "We have a new course. Forty left, twenty-five up. The planets we seek are there, perhaps two sectons away. We will find our new home among the stars of that sector."

The young heir stiffened at his father's certainty, afraid to come near or ask more questions. The bridge personnel, suddenly more alive, moved to obey their master. Only Seth's stepmother remained near him, following her husband with a worshipful, submissive gaze.

"What happened...Lady Eve?" Adam's son demanded. Like many others, he'd never really accepted her as his father's wife.

"He has seen a vision, a gift from the gods. He knows where we will go." What gave such conviction to her voice? How could she be so certain of madness?

"Are you sure Father isn't ill? The last few days..." Is he sane? Are you?

"He's fine, Seth. We must hurry. The worlds are waiting." Her voice trailed dreamily, and the young man felt sudden dread.

That gift! And he shares it with her, the old knowledge of our clan. He shares it with her, and not with me! Not with his son and heir.

Mere disdain for the woman flared into hatred and envy, and passed alike to the child she carried. He thought of his own wife's pregnancy, and bitterly wondered if his heir would matter when the Lord had another child, perhaps more gifted than he was -- it was rumoured there was strange blood in Eve's veins, from some ancestor whose siring had never been known. The burning anger and resentment grew -- was this a silent slur on the Lord's first wife, Seth's mother, that he demanded a young wife and a second family?

That imagined or real slight, and the subconscious fear that his father found him somehow unacceptable, would stay with him all his life.

He waited while Lord Adam gave further orders to the bridge crew, expecting his father would explain his decisions, and his supposed "vision," to his heir. But no explanation seemed forthcoming; the old man simply studied the star charts with burning eyes, while his wife talked in whispers beside him.

Seth was further enraged. In angry silence, knowing his presence wouldn't be missed, he stalked from the bridge.

* * * * *

A day shy of two sectons later, they first detected the binary star system. It contained a full dozen planets in the life zone; more than a score of moons were shared among those gleaming worlds; and a handful of other celestial bodies filled the heavens -- asteroids and comets, potential bases and suppliers of resources. After a brief survey, numerous tests to determine the habitability of the worlds, and a search for hidden dangers, Adam thankfully pronounced them open for colonization.

With his gleaming eyes and newly-enlivened stride, no one questioned when he proclaimed a lottery among the twelve major families, with each minor clan assigned to one of the larger dozen. A representative from each tribe thus formed drew a random lot assigned each of the planets. That done, the great fleet that had traversed the stars for so many yahrens finally disbanded, each group steering to a new home, each with many new responsibilities and a world of its own to build.

On the world which would be known as Caprica, Lord Adam and his family were among the first to walk on springy green grass and breathe fresh, unfiltered air. Seth drank from a spring, and pronounced the water sweet. No one noticed, in the depths of their feelings at the time, that the heir had set a polite distance between his father and himself, and never crossed that informal line. He and the rest of his generation joined in the unloading and building of temporary shelters until a city could be planned, land distributed for farms, boats constructed and sent out on the small seas, and the population scattered.

Lady Eve remained with her husband.

"It is a beautiful world," she gasped, tired and breathless from the short walk from the landing site to the hill.

"Yes..." Adam was preoccupied. His gaze was fixed on the rounded bay far below. Dusk slowly spread over their vantage point; the valley was already wreathed in snadows, and there was much to do before they could sleep that night.

"It will be a good place to build a culture," his wife continued. "Your alien friends are kind to

us."

He nodded slowly. "Not alien, dear love. And I will never forget the help they offered so freely. Neither must our children, Eve."

She glanced at him oddly. "What is it you fear, husband?"

"Nothing." He laughed, a full-throated roar. "I have many yahrens ahead of me, wife, and this place will be home to us forever. I am happy."

"Forever is a long time..." she murmured.

"We are human. We must always think in terms of forever -- and in terms of the day, as well. When we have passed on, our love and laughter will still echo among the worlds here, and glow in the light of our double sun. And I will write what I know, of our past and our destiny, and the tales the beings of light told me. We must remember them, and that they will be here when we need their advice, or their help, in any way. That knowledge will be my legacy to our daughter, along with everything else we can give our own flesh and blood. We give her a great deal, a great and joyous hope. Be happy, my Eve."

"With you, always," she replied with simple honesty.

He reached for her, drawing her ungainly figure into his arms. "The future is very bright for us..."

"Oh!"

"What...?" He was alarmed.

She began to smile. "I think our daughter knows we are home!"

And it was so. It was duly recorded that Eve, the last child born on old Kobol, was the first to give birth on the new world of Caprica, to a daughter, named Sarai, of the House of Sagan. And Sarai grew happily to womanhood, while her parents lived in their love for her and each other. When the time came, she was ready for the task assigned her by the gods.

"Commander"

(By Karen Klinck)

A man of dedication,
Dreaming of the mystic planet, "Earth" --
With a sense of sureness that it <u>will</u> be found.
Much of his life spent in defence of his people,
He leads them now across a sea of stars.



By KAREN KLINCK

"Career Secton"
or
"Here, Kiddie, Kiddie, Kiddie..."

(By Karen Klinck)

"Gentlemen!"

Adama's voice had such a studied hearty ring to it that Starbuck quailed inside. He'd always been sensitive to the feel of things, and the feel right now made him want to hide in his bunk like a frightened six-yahren-old, a very unWarrior-like response. He, Apollo, and Boomer were standing on the bridge awaiting orders. Now, the pair of Lieutenants exchanged doubtful looks. Whatever was in store for them, the Commander obviously expected them to dislike it.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that you've been assigned to detached duty aboard the Orphan Ship and the PHOENIX for the next secton. You'll ferry your Vipers to the Orphan Ship first, spend three days there, then on to the PHOENIX for the rest of the secton." Adama beamed at the three pilots. "Your assignment is Career Secton for the youngsters. The Fleet needs Warriors, and who better than the upcoming generation? I'm sure you'll do an admirable job convincing those young people to join the Military. Lieutenants Vi and Mara will join you via shuttle.

"I know I can count on you to influence a new crop of cadets. Now, you'd better get down to your Vipers. It wouldn't do to be late and give those youngsters a bad impression of our Warriors."

He received a trio of dubious "Yes, sir"s, and the three left the bridge.

"Propaganda," Boomer said sardonically.

"Kiddie-work," Starbuck groaned.

"That's what you get for being such a heroic figure, Bucko," Boomer returned.

"Felgercarb!"

"You two cut it out," Apollo ordered. "It's only a secton."

"I'd rather pull long probe for a secton!"

"I said, knock it off, Starbuck. And try to look like a proper Warrior, will you? No cigars, snap your jacket, comb your hair..."

"Oh, felgercarb!"

"...and watch your language, too. These are impressionable children..."

"Oh, felgercarb!" Starbuck and Boomer moaned in unison.

"Tell ya what, Apollo " Boomer offered. "They can crawl all over your Viper. That's why our ships are going along, you know."

"Impressionable..." Starbuck mourned. "The Lords of Kobol save me from assignments like this. Kiddie-types underfoot..."

"You get along with Boxey," Apollo pointed out.

"There's only one of him!"

"Cheer up, Starbuck," Boomer said with a grin. "We'll only be on the Orphan Ship for three days. At least the PHOENIX won't have so many...kids on it. It'll have people we can talk to, maybe snag a drink, sneak a cigar... Starbuck, what's wrong?"

Starbuck shook himself out of a trance, saying hastily, "Nothing, nothing."

Boomer chewed his lower lip thoughtfully for a moment before climbing into his Viper after the other two hopped into theirs. They received launch clearance, sailed down the tubes, and set course for the Orphan Ship.

Apollo expected more grumbling, but Starbuck was silent, and Boomer only sighed occasionally. He recognized an undercurrent to that silence, but couldn't put a finger on it.

When they landed in the emergency bay of the Orphan Ship, its commander welcomed them warmly. "Glad to see you pilots!" he called as they slid down the sides of their craft.

The man cast an approving eye over the trim V-formation a little jockeying had produced, and nodded. "The boys will like that. Very neat. And having three heroes along will help. Career Secton is for the entire ship, you know, not just the oldest classes. I'm sure you'll be besieged with questions from all sides. The children will just love having you aboard."

His manner changed suddenly, and he became apologetic. "Ah...pilots...Warriors... Ah, I...don't have enough empty staterooms to quarter you all. There're only two... Would it inconvenience one of you to stay in one of the dormitory rooms? I'll threaten the boys with dire punishments if they bother you, of course. And..."

"Why, no, Lieutenant Starbuck won't mind at all, will you, Starbuck?" Apollo said blandly, with a devilish twinkle in his eyes.

"Ah...no, no, no. Not at all." He glared at Apollo.

"Oh, thank you, Lieutenant. Thank you. That will make it so much easier. Please come with me."

"Did you remember to disarm your lasers?" Apollo asked in an undertone as they followed him down the corridor.

"Yes, daddy," Starbuck said meekly.

"Oh, no!" Boomer replied in the same instant, in a tone of mock horror. "I was hoping to see the side of the ship go. I even left the turbos engaged so that if they missed with the lasers, they might smear Viper all over the landing bay walls. What do you take us for?"

Whatever the Captain took them for was forestalled as the commander turned his attention to them again, explaining the layout of the ship. Apollo had half an ear for him, and the other half of

his attention on his friends. He was sure they'd pull something. Maybe I should've taken the bed in the dorm room...? Well, it's too late to change the arrangements now...

He hoped Starbuck wouldn't disgrace the GALACTICA. Sometimes his brash friend had a strange sense of humour.

The five Warriors met the first wave of youngsters at an assembly. Vi and Mara whispered something in Starbuck's ear that gave him a wicked grin as they stepped up to the lecture table. Apollo shot him an uneasy glance. Maybe he should have pressed for Starbuck to go on long probe.

Apollo gave the standard talk -- these were all teenagers, ready for opting their futures. He introduced his cohorts. Each was politely greeted with applause, and Vi earned a wolf-whistle from the back of the room. Starbuck leaned back in his chair and laughed as a commotion in that part of the hall indicated the adults were trying to locate the offender. He didn't think they d have much luck. Apollo glared at him, which did no good at all. Trying to ignore the noise, the Captain opened the talk to questions from the floor.

One young man immediately popped up. "What do you do when you re not flying?"

Starbuck made a strangled noise. Apollo stepped hard on his foot as he answered, "We have many duties. We have to keep up with the latest developments, so some of our assignments amount to study." The assembly groaned, and he grinned. "Sometimes we have escort duty, sometimes we're simply on alert in the ready room if there's an emergency. In cases like that, we simply sit around, talk, read, sleep..."

"And lose money to Starbuck here in card games," Boomer supplied.

All the children laughed, and Apollo resigned himself to a slightly freer lecture than the Warriors usually gave. Except that they were undeniably Colonial heroes, Starbuck and Boomer were a mistake. At least, Starbuck definitely was. The Commander should have sent him on long probe and kept Bojay, or Sheba, or Greenbean, or Jolly, or anyone else, for this assignment.

"What do the women do?"

"We're Viper pilots. We're also shuttle pilots. Some women have very responsible positions on the bridge. The ground crews are about equal in makeup. At one point, all but two of the Viper pilots were female, when a virus knocked out most of the regular pilots. We've proven we can fight just as well as any man in the squadrons."

Oh, no, Apollo thought with an inward groan. Vi's got a chip on her shoulder. That's all I need, on top of Starbuck. Why didn't I request long probe for this secton?

"Do Warriors get married?" one girl asked in a serious voice.

"Of course!" Apollo exclaimed. "Whatever gave you the idea they didn t?"

"There didn't seem to be any time for anything but fighting. What about babies?"

Apollo felt Starbuck shift in his chair, and stomped on his foot again. "Convention was that a woman practiced birth control while on shipboard duty. If she chose to start a family, she would put in a request for planetside or refueling station duty. Some of the ladies were career-oriented, and never married or had children. Now, of course, things are changing. There's no reason not to have children."

"I can think of a few," Starbuck muttered, just loud enough for Apollo to overhear. The Captain privately agreed with him.

"That, of course, is a big decision to make," Apollo continued without batting an eye. "It would be up to the couple in question to decide whether they wanted a child at that time." And how, his mind continued, did I ever get off on this subject?

The girl nodded gravely and sat down again. Apollo noticed that her hand slipped into that of the boy next to her, and gave a small smile. This discussion certainly had not been merely intellectual to her.

"Viper pilots," he told the assembly, "are only one small group aboard a battlestar. You have technicians of all sorts, computer programmers, dieticians, medical personnel -- many different jobs, some of whose personnel you'll be meeting this next secton. We always need the best from each graduating class -- but it's up to each of you to decide what career to pursue. This survivor fleet will need a lot of skilled people if it's to keep going in the future. But I am confident -- we...will...survive!"

At his last triumphant words, the children burst into cheers. The commander took the opportunity to adjourn the assembly and steer the Warriors off to the midday meal. Although they were already drained from the mass meeting, they each had a table to oversee. Apollo got half of Starbuck's future bunkmates, while his friend got the other half.

As they sat down, a boy at the far end of Apollo's table piped, "Hey, Captain, how many Cylons have you killed?"

"I lost count long ago. You don't keep track, you just do your duty."

He got a look of scorn. "I'd keep count!"

"Eat your protein."

"I don't want it."

"Fine. Go hungry. There are lots of people in the Fleet who'd give a lot to have what you do."

"Give it to them, then! Ugh! I don't like this stuff!"

"All right." Apollo kept his temper with an effort. "Bring your plate up here to me."

The table stilled, and the troublemaker at the far end gulped in amazement. Starbuck's table was listening avidly. One dark-haired imp about halfway down its length slowly slid his plate off the table, watching Starbuck, whose attention was on the developing drama at the neighbouring table.

"Well?" Apollo barked. "Didn't you hear me? Bring your plate up to me. If you don't want it, you don't eat it. Or dessert, either."

Defeated, but acting as if he was disobeying Apollo's orders, the lad took a healthy bite. Apollo met Starbuck's eyes and started to say something. He was startled by the steel in the Lieutenant's sudden snap, and a tone rarely heard.

"If you dump that plate, you'll eat it off the floor!"

The dark-haired boy froze. He'd thought Starbuck's concentration to be elsewhere. He debated,

and the Warrior turned a cold gaze on him. The plate came hurriedly up on the table again. Starbuck grinned at Apollo.

"They're used to their guardians pleading with 'em. I grew up in a situation like this -- and the older kids had table duty over the younger ones. I'd've made him eat it off the floor!"

Apollo sent a sour glance over his table. "I apologize about tonight -- in advance," he growled.

"Why?" the kid next to him shrilled.

"Because I'm bunking in your dorm," Starbuck contributed.

"Ohboy!" both tables whooped.

"You may not think it's so great later on," Starbuck said mildly. "Seriously, Apollo, it isn't so bad. You're spoiled by living in married quarters, that's all. I still bunk in bachelors', remember?"

Apollo looked at both rioting tables and shook his head. "My apology still stands. And, you know, I'm beginning to see your point from this morning. <u>You!</u> Hands are for animals! Use your spoon!"

The flight leader had to clean ice cream off a grubby-looking, pudgy lad, who promptly reached for the dish with his fingers again. He stopped when Starbuck quietly offered advice.

"Take it away from him, Apollo. He doesn't know how to eat like a human yet."

Apollo looked back at Starbuck, whose eyes were sparkling. He nodded, and scooped up the dish. The boy squawked in indignation, and the commander appeared magically.

"Trouble, Warriors?" he asked anxiously.

"No trouble at all, sir. The youngster down there -- the one with his mouth open -- seems to think spoons are for decoration." Starbuck grinned. "My section leader never let us get away with that, so I thought I'd pass the tradition along." The grin got wider. "Give the nice man the dish, Apollo."

Apollo mechanically handed it to the stupified commander, then shook off his amazement and glared at Starbuck. The Lieutenant snickered, then lunged over the table to prevent one little boy from sticking his table knife into his companion.

"Lively lot," he grunted, firmly putting the disputed cutlery by his own plate.

"I want my ice cream!" the pudgy boy whined.

Starbuck grunted, and separated his combatants again. The commander watched him, then smiled slightly. Starbuck was doing a fine job, and the older man respected him for it. Not everyone could handle children.

"One more move out of either of you, and I'm going to bang your heads together until you see stars!" Starbuck warned. Then he remembered where he was, and glanced over his shoulder. What worked in the old Caprican Orphanage would not necessarily work here and now. "Unless the commander has something else in mind for you."

"Two sectons of dish duty," that man replied promptly, while reflecting that if it hadn't been for Career Secton, he'd have let Starbuck go ahead and discipline his rowdies. The Lieutenant had a sure touch.

He turned stern eyes on the boy Apollo had deprived of his dessert. "And two for you, too! Such manners in front of the GALACTICA's two most heroic Warriors! I shall speak to your sector guardians and teachers! If any of this ends up on your permanent records, you'll wind up as sanitation engineers, storeroom clerks..."

"Prison barge guards," grunted Starbuck, who had a low opinion of civilian security.

"Or those they guard," the commander finished, quick on the uptake. He glanced at Starbuck, who stood with a squirming child held easily under each arm.

The Warrior looked down at his armfuls and inquired, "Do you have a pool I can drop these in?"

"Starbuck!" Apollo hissed with impotent fury. As he turned the squirmers loose, the Captain continued icily, "Lieutenant, may I have a word with you in private?"

A resigned Starbuck followed him off to a corner. Apollo was furious.

"Lieutenant, may I remind you that we're supposed to be guiding them toward a useful career, not showing them what a scatter-brained fool you are? You are supposed to be on your best behaviour on this run, and furthermore, you're on duty every centon of this secton! You heard Commander Adama! If I get any more nonsense out of you, I'll report you. Act like a Warrior, not a ten-yahren-old kid! Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir!" Starbuck replied stiffly.

"Then go and act like a Warrior."

Starbuck walked slowly away. The sights, the smells, the very feel of the ship were beginning to get to him. His own childhood and adolescence came sharply back to him, bringing memories of all the loneliness and insecurity he had felt. His natural skills had come to his aid -- his short reaction time and natural flying abilities -- but he'd been raised in the largest orphanage on Caprica, and in a place like that, anyone who failed to run with the crowd was persecuted mercilessly by those who did. Starbuck had never made friends easily; acquaintances just weren't the same.

Apollo's lecture was the crowning break. Like a mountain of blocks, the young man's peace and composure were shattered. All his careful memory blocks jiggled out of the way, and all his compulsive striving to be the best pilot seemed empty and echoing. Even hiding behind a cigar, a grin, a drink, gambling and women no longer helped.

So Starbuck did the same thing he had always done when he was upset -- he found a quiet corner and stewed.

In a way, Apollo's right. I can't charge into a playground scrap and confront my tormentors. That's in my past. I can't very well take Apollo on -- I'd really get in trouble for that, goin' after a superior officer. No, I have to find some way of blocking these reactions down, somewhere deep inside. I'll sort them out some other time.

The Orphan Ship wasn't much different from his old planetside orphanage. For all its people, she had the same dark rooms and little-used corridors. The Warrior found a corridor with a view of

the stars and settled down to calm himself. It was a seldom-travelled area, for all the magnificence of the stars.

Starbuck had no idea how long he sat there, feet pulled up before him, hands resting lightly on his knees. The cold splendor of the stars soothed him, as it always did, and he gradually calmed down. A small scuffling noise made him look away finally, with eyes that smarted and teared from having stared out so long. A boy of about twelve stood before the long viewport, face solemn, eyes wide. He didn't see Starbuck until he sighed heavily and turned. In that time, the man classified him as another loner.

Somehow, in the dimly-lit, spellbound corridor, it seemed the most natural thing in the universe to both of them for the youngster to burrow into the Warrior's arms. They both sought the comfort of that contact. Soon the boy's racking sobs ceased, and he breathed normally, his head on Starbuck's shoulder. The Lieutenant blamed his own stinging eyes on staring too long at the viewport, and held him tightly.

The boy finally spoke, his voice thick with still-unshed tears. "Dad went back into the house that night, to see if dinner was ready yet. He said Mom was too busy listening to the news to be much good. I was up on a hill, looking at the stars. I was going back -- and I saw the house explode. They were both there. I wasn't. I wasn't!"

"It helps to cry sometimes," Starbuck murmured, his own voice husky. "Your grief is real; don't deny it. I saw our planet die -- my friends, my people -- and I couldn't help. I've seen friends die in battle. Save your grief if you gotta, but don't bottle it up too long. Let it out. Admit you're human. That's a big difference between us and the Cylons -- we can cry."

"Have you cried?"

"Yes..." Starbuck thought about the incredible "Ship of lights," when he <u>knew</u> Apollo was dead.

"Do you have a family?"

Startled, he looked down at the tousled head on his shoulder. "No," he said slowly. "I've been an orphan since I can remember. Raised in the Caprica Orphanage. Somebody found me wandering after a Cylon raid. No one claimed me."

"You <u>never</u> had a family?"

"Never. And I never fit in well with the gangs of kids at the orphanage, either. I've always walked my own road... But I believe that some day we'll be strong enough to return to the fight, and this time we'll know better. We'll blast the Cylons right out of the skies. We'll free whatever people remain as puppets under their rule. Mankind will prevail!"

"Mankind will prevail," the boy sighed. A lingering tenseness left his body. "I want to help mankind prevail. How can I learn?"

Starbuck recognized the childish yearning, and smiled. "Study hard. Play hard. Choose a profession, and work for it. Don't go crazy in it, but work hard. Don t let your past sour you. Learn from new experiences. Be <u>human</u>."

"Is that how you live?"

"Mostly," he admitted. "Right now, I live only for today, because I may not have a tomorrow. That's a risk I take every day. You, on the other hand, may have a brilliant future in front of

you."

"Can I be a Warrior?"

"If it suits you. If you study hard. We need Warriors who've studied, who know what they're up against, who're ready to build their future. It'll be a long and hard job. Still, don't go overboard. There's nothing worse than an officer who can't let off steam now and then. I used to set the Academy on its ear once in a while, just to relax. Hey, look. You obviously know who I am, but how about me? What's your name?"

"Marco." The boy turned his head and smiled shyly. Starbuck smiled back.

"Well, Marco, I think we'd better be getting back into sight." He sighed. "I don't know about you, but I'm sure I'm going to be missed! And all I need today is another lecture from Captain Apollo."

"Why?" Marco asked as Starbuck got stiffly to his feet and reached for the ceiling in a bone-cracking stretch.

"He doesn't understand," the Warrior explained. "He's got a family, and there's never been any doubt of what he'd do with himself. He's self-assured, and just a little bit less than human at times. He gets so serious..."

"He sounds silly!"

Starbuck laughed.

* * * * *

"Boomer, where's Starbuck?"

"Dunno. I haven't seen him since -- the Lords of Kobol help us all! -- lunch. Why?"

"The whole idea of this Career Secton is to lead these children into positions that need to be filled!" Apollo stormed. "Starbuck's playing the fool won't bring anyone in! I've already warned him once..."

"You what?" Boomer lowered his voice quickly, but kept the same intense tone. "You're the one who's the fool! Don't you realize how much of a strain this is putting on him? Apollo, Starbuck's an orphan! Remember? Don't you realize what sort of memories this brings back? How much he identifies with those kids aboard this tub who're loners? Whose families the Cylons killed? How hard it is for him to keep joking, when inside he's dying? Don't you think he has feelings? He should never have been tapped for this ship!"

"Oh, my God!" Apollo turned stricken eyes on the black man. "Boomer, what have I done?"

"I don't know," Boomer said grimly. "Why don't you just leave Starbuck alone for a while?"

"Mmmmm." A small form, aged about two-and-a-half, attached itself limpet-like to Apollo's leg. "If he found a quiet spot, I think I envy him." He hoisted the boy to his lap as he sat on the nearest available chair. Boomer stood nearby, not knowing what else to do. "Now, look here, young man. Just who do you think you are?"

The child giggled happily and bounced on Apollo's lap. A strange look crossed the Warrior's face,

and he hesitantly beckoned to one of the adults watching the playroom full of small children.

"I think we've had an accident," he murmured, embarrassed. The woman smiled placidly and took the soaked child from him, revealing a large wet patch on his knee.

"Captain," Boomer chuckled softly, "your uniform is a disgrace! You'd better go get cleaned up."

"Oh, Lords!" Apollo groaned. "Next time, I wangle long probe!"

Boomer hooted, and followed him out the door. Apollo showed him a grim smile and told him to stay with the crowd while he changed. Boomer went back in, grumbling about martyrdom.

Apollo grinned, and went in search of his assigned quarters. His path led him down a deserted corridor with a long viewport. He almost literally bumped into Starbuck.

"Starbuck..." he began hesitantly.

"Where am I supposed to be now, Captain?" the other man asked wearily.

"Somewhere in sight. Hey, look, Starbuck...I'm sorry. I forgot...and that after you and those Nomen almost tore up the GALACTICA. I can convince Commander Adama that you'd be better off..."

"Somewhere else?" Starbuck said. "Let's give it another try, Apollo. I think it won't be too much...strain. Anyway, it's only three days. Now, if I was gonna be assigned here..."

"If you took an assignment like that, they could lock you up as certifiably insane," Apollo responded tartly. He looked down at his leg. "I've got to go change. One of those kids had good aim. Boomer's in the preschool playroom."

"Kiddie-tour," Starbuck sighed, and went off the way Apollo had come. The Captain showed up in the playroom again a little while later.

"Watch it from now on, Captain," Starbuck murmured out of the side of his mouth. "Uniforms aren't so easy to get over here, you know."

"Oh, cut it out! I gave my pants to the laundry. They shouldn't be too hard to keep separate. By the way, before I forget -- what was it the women said to you in assembly that you found so funny?"

"Hm? Oh, yeah! Vi said she hoped we got a good crop of pilots out of this. If we get a lot, she'll be senior, and able to pull Viper duty instead of shuttle."

Apollo laughed. "They'll be pushing Warrior status as hard as they can. Which, after all, is what the Commander wants."

It seemed like ages to the weary men before night came and they could turn in. Starbuck went to bed with his young roommates long before the other men. The two women seemed to have no trouble at all with the children, but frazzled nerves were the norm by the time Apollo and Boomer reached the sanctuary of their "staterooms." The Captain seriously wondered if there was any ambrosia aboard the Orphan Ship. He could now appreciate Starbuck's distinction between Boxey's being "only one," and an entire shipload of children with few adults at hand. The Warrior felt he needed a drink.

The next morning started out deceptively mild. Breakfast was quiet, except for one minor flurry.

An officious man came up to Starbuck and spoke to him. The innocent expression on Starbuck's face, coupled with a peculiar half-smile well-known to the Viper pilots, aroused the immediate suspicions of his comrades as he answered a question. The disconcerted man retreated; Apollo and Boomer exchanged glances and firmly collared their friend for an explanation.

"Oh, he asked me if I'd had any trouble sleeping through the noise in my dorm compartment last night."

"Well?"

"Now, Boomer, you know I can sleep through anything."

"What noise?" Apollo asked. It sounded like a threat.

"I think he meant the pillow fight," Starbuck grinned, having regained his equilibrium from the day before. "But since he expects me to do his duty for him -- he's the guardian in charge of those kids -- and I didn't see anything wrong with it, I just told him I hadn't heard anything out of the ordinary."

"Who started it?"

"Me. Apollo, you remember the ice cream kid yesterday? He announced that, (a) all Warriors were fakes -- his political science teacher said so, and it must be true, or why else would we be running away? -- (b) it was all my fault he'd gotten two sectons of dish duty -- and he was right; he also deserved it! -- and (c) not only was he not planning on sleeping with any fake of a Warrior, but he was gonna drive me out. When being noisy didn't work, he took a running jump on my stomach."

"And all you did was smack him with a pillow?" Apollo asked, an angry glitter in his eyes. "I think I'd've killed him. I might yet."

"Stand in line," Starbuck growled. "If he keeps it up, I might lock him in a storage compartment for the night -- along with that poli-sci instructor to keep him company! I've got a feeling that the windbag who wanted to know about the noise was the man in question."

"The rest of the compartment joined in?" Boomer asked.

"They apparently don't like him any more than I do." Starbuck shrugged. "Plus, of course, it was a great chance to have fun."

"All day today," Boomer groaned as they walked down the hall toward another assembly, "and almost a whole 'nother day tomorrow. I don't think I can stand it!"

Boomer had chased his gun halfway across the dining room when a light-fingered boy carefully lifted it from its holster during breakfast. Mara had seen the act and called it to Boomer's attention. It had taken both of them to corner the delighted child.

"From now on, I'm going to make sure Boxey behaves," Apollo sighed, as weary as the other two at the prospect of another day with the children. Fortunately, from the Warriors' point of view, there were classes most of the day. This meant they each met small, more behaved groups of youngsters. The questions tended to be baffling, harrowing, and unintentially hilarious, but each one managed to keep his or her face straight as well as his or her temper in check.

Occasionally, that took an effort. Mara was told by a male teacher that she should get married

and have babies for her husband, and stop pretending to do a Warrior's job. She looked him over and asked when he thought he might fit into a uniform, then turned the discussion back to the class.

Apollo gave guided tours of the Vipers to small groups. Among other things, this involved lifting the small ones up to sit in the seat. One young boy was so anxious to get in that he climbed over Apollo -- who almost got a foot in the face. He had to laugh, though, at the delighted whoops coming from the seat where the youngster blasted away at imaginary Cylons.

He wasn't pleased when Vi passed by him several centars later, at lunch. She paused by his strangely quiet table to inquire softly, "Captain, do you realize you've got a big glob of something in your hair?"

His look of surprise told her he had no idea, and a snicker from nearby told them both that the children did.

"Starbuck, keep an eye on things over here, too, will you?"

"Sure thing, Apollo."

Vi calmly followed the Captain back to his room. She checked his hair and chuckled. "Somebody besides Boxey likes mushies," she giggled, unable to keep a straight face. "It's all dried stiff. You'll have to wash it out."

"I'll bet it was the one who went up over me like a ladder."

"Cheer up, Captain. Career Secton comes only once a yahren."

"Thank the Lords of Kobol!"

"Good luck."

Apollo climbed into the shower, wondering if the entire population of children was in cahoots to drive him crazy. It took the rest of lunch period to get all the gooey mess out of his hair. He got back to the lunchroom just as it was dismissed. Mara handed him a sandwich as she passed; Starbuck added a steaming cup and a wink. Apollo soon learned why -- the Lieutenant had spiked it. He didn't know where the amazing conniver had found the liquor, nor did he care. He <u>did</u> appreciate it.

Boomer found him leaning against the corridor wall, finishing his food. He looked the Captain up and down, and with a wicked twinkle in his eyes inquired, "Aren't you supposed to be someplace?"

"That's enough out of you. Boomer, do you think <u>we</u> were ever this bad?"

"We were probably worse. Me, I used to hotwire air-cars and go joy-riding. Starbuck ran his games arcade at the Academy -- with the Academy's war simulation rooms. I've heard stories about Vi, Bojay... You know what the trouble is with people like you and Sheba?"

"No. Tell me."

"You never dared step out of line because those gods you admired so much on those big ships would hear about it. You never had any fun in life."

"I did so," Apollo objected.

"Huh! Starbuck..."

"The last time Starbuck had 'fun,' the ship was thrown into an uproar!"

"And everybody settled down after they'd let off steam, and worked the better for it."

"Besides which, Starbuck's main idea of fun is gambling, and the last time out but one, he lost me a secton's pay!"

"He gambles every time he climbs into a Viper," Boomer said flatly. "So do I. So do you."

"Gambling that we'll come back alive, you mean?" Apollo asked. Boomer nodded. "I guess so. Starbuck just takes it a little farther. Besides the casinos on the RISING STAR, he gambles the Commander'll put up with him, that none of his girl-friends will find out about the rest..."

Boomer shrugged.

"Oh, well. Let's get back to...work. We'll make it good. But they'd better find another group for the next Career Secton!"

"I'll second that."

* * * * *

At midshift the next day, they transferred over to the PHOENIX. Each man sighed with relief as they left the Orphan Ship behind.

"Apollo," Starbuck said absently, "I don't like the way Fatso grinned at you when we left. Was he in your Viper this morning?"

"Yes, but I don't think he could have done anything," Apollo replied doubtfully. "We had all systems locked shut. What would have been within his grasp -- physically or mentally?"

"I think we may find out when we land. Apollo, maybe you'd better go back to the Orphan Ship right now."

"Starbuck..."

"You've probably got gum on your seat."

There was a moment of stunned silence, then Apollo's Viper peeled off and headed back the way they'd come. Starbuck and Boomer loafed in formation until he rejoined them fifteen centons later.

"Was there?"

"There was. He caught it in front of the entire assembly. What are you two doing out here still?"

"We told Colonel Tigh we needed some peace and quiet," Boomer said drolly, stressing the last word. Apollo laughed softly, then louder as the black man added, "He didn't argue with us."

"Let's go."

Without further ado, they landed on the PHOENIX. Her commander also met them, expressed his delight in their arrival, and offered them a drink in his quarters, unlike his counterpart aboard the Orphan Ship. Mindful of his friends' hopeful gazes on him, Apollo tried not to sound too eager as he accepted.

The commander looked the three of them over and chuckled. "You had the Orphan Ship assignment the past three days, didn't you? Maybe I'd better make those drinks doubles."

Starbuck's sigh made them all laugh, himself included.

The commander led the way to his quarters, poured ambrosia with a liberal hand, and watched the trio slowly relax.

"I've been dreaming about this," Starbuck muttered.

"What, no more pillow fights?"

"I don't know about <u>them</u>, but <u>I</u> was too tired. I don't think even a red alert would've woke me."

To the commander's curious gaze, Apollo explained, "Starbuck was quartered with a section of ten-yahren-olds because there wasn't enough room elsewhere. But pity the women. They got the Orphan Ship all secton!"

Starbuck snorted. "And those kids walk in terror of them, too."

"Give me long probe any day!" Boomer said.

The commander laughed outright. "All you'll see of children here is classroom centars, and a few get-to-know-the-pilots parties that have been scheduled. However, I also extended the bar centars so you could relax afterward. You'll need it."

"A man of rare understanding," Starbuck said at the end of another long sigh. This earned another laugh at his expense.

"Well, gentlemen," Commander Thoren chuckled, "I don't know what you did to earn the wrath of Commander Adama and Colonel Tigh, but I suppose I'll have to conduct you to work out your sentences."

"Apollo," Starbuck murmured in that worthy's ear as they walked down a corridor, "could you stop being the Commander's son for a while, so he'll stop giving you all the horrible duties to prove he's not influenced by blood, and incidentally roping us in, too?"

"Aw, knock it off, Starbuck!" Apollo pleaded. However, he knew the other was right.

Starbuck refused to be squelched. "Just think, you're pulling punishment detail for being born to the wrong father."

"Shut up, Starbuck."

Classrooms full of adolescents swam into their gazes as the somewhat bemused Warriors launched into their sales pitch again. The children in the classes were polite and subdued, and the Warriors slowly began to unwind a bit. Perhaps this wouldn't be as hectic as the Orphan Ship.

But a new development arose at the get-to-know-the-pilots party that night. The three were

morosely contemplating more party punch when Boomer was collared by a young teenager who wanted t talk ships. Starbuck and Apollo left them to it and wandered forlornly through the crowded room. Most of the children had congregated in small knots, discussing their own interests. The two deserted Warriors began talking shop, glad of each other's adult company.

This went on for some time, but they finally became aware of a new factor. Starbuck had directed their drift to the vicinity of the snack table, which they attacked with a will. Suddenly, they realized that a girl of about fourteen had followed them over and stood at a distance -- had, in fact, followed them all evening. She smoothed back her hair, gazed at Starbuck adoringly, and sighed rapturously.

Startled amazement on Apollo's face turned to a wicked grin. Starbuck groaned with feeling. He'd been riding his friend about his father all day, and had a feeling Apollo was going to give some back now.

"Part of your harem, Bucko?" the grinning Captain inquired so only his friend could hear. "They get younger all the time."

"How would you like to lose more than a secton's pay the next time we play cards? I'll take you for every cubit you've got!"

"Every young girl's dream... The heroic Warrior..."

"And I'll fix you, the next time we land somewhere!"

"Why don't you go talk to her, and give her the thrill of her life?"

"Oh, that doesn't come until she's old enough," Starbuck said blandly.

It took Apollo a moment to realize what the smug blond-haired man was hinting at; then he snorted. "All right, God's Gift to Women -- just for that, I'll go over and invite her to speak with you. Perhaps she'll want you to sign her memory book. You could even kiss her -- on the cheek, Starbuck!"

Starbuck leered at him. "Yes, daddy."

Apollo took note of the devil in his eyes and wisely decided to leave the girl where she was. He'd hate to have Starbuck start something that would get back to Commander Adama's ears. The matter was taken out of his hands when the girl retreated a few feet into a group of her peers. The whole group began whispering and giggling. Starbuck, who had given a sigh of relief, looked more apprehensive.

"A whole harem..." Apollo began with mischievous glee, when one of the other girls shook her head decisively and pointed at the dark-haired Captain. A full half of the girls in the group nodded.

Starbuck nearly choked on the laughter he was trying to hold in. "Speaking of harems, buddy..." he gurgled happily.

Apollo began slowly backing away.

"Oh, no, you don't! We've gotta stay here until the party's officially over," Starbuck pointed out. "While I must say, they're a bit younger than I'm used to, maybe you need that age to get back in the swing of things."

Apollo's answer was cut off by the arrival of Commander Thoren.

"All alone, Warriors? I noticed your colleague talking to someone, but nobody seems to have sought you out. I expect that's rather a relief this far into the secton. Am I right?"

Both men grinned.

"Yes, sir," Apollo agreed.

"Well, there's a few centons to go yet, but why don't the two of you take off? Your friend's in a heated discussion over ship design, so he won't miss you."

"Thanks, sir."

"Many thanks."

Starbuck's sigh in the deserted corridor was one of total weariness. "This is the longest secton I've ever spent!"

"Wait 'til next yahren."

"No. I'd rather face the entire Cylon fleet unarmed than go through this again. You wait and see. I'll figure some way of getting out of it."

He probably would, Apollo reflected. Aloud, he said, "When you do, cut me in."

"It's a deal."

And hands met in a sealing shake.



"HERE IT IS STARBUCK, THE ULTIMATE ANTI-CYLON WEAPON!"


A WAY OUT
BY PAUL GORDON

"A Way Out"

(by Paul Gordon)

Would you risk your soul for him?

Apollo awoke with a strangled gasp, and stared wildly about the dimly-lit ready room. He was shaking as he sat up, and felt drenched with sweat. A face appeared before him, and he drew back in dismay. Spectres shouldn't be able to leave your dreams...

"Skipper, you okay?" It was Jolly, who'd been asleep in the bunk beneath him.

"Jolly!" He didn't try to hide the relief in his voice. "What...?"

The stocky Sergeant shrugged, keeping his voice to a whisper so he wouldn't wake the other Warriors. "Heard you muttering, and you've been tossing around for better'n a centar. Bad dream?"

"Yeah. Hope I didn't wake anybody else."

"Doesn't look like it."

"Good. Better try and get back to sleep, Sergeant. We could be called any time." He turned away, setting his head back on the pillow. He was less concerned with setting a good example than with avoiding any further discussion of his "nightmare."

After a moment, the other man's worried face vanished, and he could be heard settling his bulk back on the lower bunk. A few centons and restless creaks later, and gentle snoring proclaimed that the Sergeant was asleep.

The Captain couldn't doze off again; the awful dream had his adrenaline pumping, and he was too tense. An image kept forming in his mind's eye -- a friend he couldn't identify, a body he couldn't turn over, somebody dying...

He shivered. Alert periods were bad enough. After a Cylon attack, or some other emergency, the Warriors might be kept on top alert, confined to the ready rooms, for as long as a secton. After six days of only Blue Squadron for companionship, with nerves and fatigue nibbling at them all, the strain was telling.

Apollo took a deep breath, then another, forcing every muscle to relax. He'd been good at the old discipline at the Academy -- although, since the Destruction, exhaustion usually made it unnecessary...

* * * * *

"No trace of Cylons, Commander," Omega reported. "We may be able to take our Warriors off full

alert."

"Good, good. How is Colonel Tigh's damage assessment report?"

"Nearly complete, sir. He's aboard the Electronics ship, at the rear of the Fleet. At last report, he expected to be returning to the GALACTICA in a few centars."

Adama rubbed his weary eyes. Six days since the Cylon attack. Six very busy days. They didn't know where the Cylons had come from, or where they had vanished to so quickly. But damage was still being repaired on several ships in the Fleet, and the Warriors were still on alert. In the entire time, he himself had barely left the bridge long enough to get a few centars' sleep or to grab a quick meal.

Colonel Tigh was likewise overworked. The survey of Fleet damage occupied a great deal of time, with a dozen ships hit in the surprise attack. Repairs were continuing on all ships, of course. But the extent of the damage had to be determined, spare equipment and replacement parts had to be found, and estimates of repair time once those parts were available had to be made, all of which took time, energy, and an occasional argument over which ships and repairs were more important and would take precedence.

In the meantime, the Fleet's movements and speed were severely restricted. The Warriors remained on constant alert. And Commander Adama remained on the bridge while his Executive Officer toured other ships.

* * * * *

"Launch-a-second-attack."

"By-your-command.

"We-must-capture-Warrior-personnel-alive-if-we-wish-to-learn-the-humans'-ultimate-goal. We-must-discover-the-destination-of-the-human fleet."

"By-your-command."

* * * * *

"Father!"

"What is it, Athena?" Commander Adama snapped back.

"Scan shows a wave of small ships heading for the Fleet! Warbook identifies as three-passenger fighters!"

"Cylon attack craft," the elderly Warrior muttered. "Omega..."

The Flight Officer had already begun activating the alert sirens, signalling the Warriors in their ready rooms, and informing the other ships in the Fleet to expect imminent attack. His second series of actions armed the battlestar's own laser turrets and missile chambers, and closed the positive shield that would protect this part of the ship during any attack locking off all chambers assured they would be oxygen-tight should the ship sustain any serious damage.

Below him, the launch coordinator, a very efficient Corporal named Rigel, was directing squadron launchings and checking the status of all Warriors and Vipers. Her long braids flew as she turned

her head to report to her Commander. "Red Squadron was up; they're away. Blue Squadron launching now. Green and Yellow are in position and being manned; should be away in a centon."

"Thank you, Rigel." Adama leaned over Omega's shoulder again, resting his palms on the console as he studied his hurrying, seemingly chaotic bridge crew. What are we up against this time? How many ships? Where are they coming from?

There were times when it was very frustrating to be the Commander, to have to stand on the bridge and wait impatiently while others fought the battles, to be unable to affect the outcome through any means other than strategy and advance preparation. Adama's instinct was to be out there fighting, too, but he could do no more than the rest of his crew, watching tensely, fulfilling his assigned task...

* * * * *

Mercifully, the battle was brief, although for the over-fatigued and keyed-up pilots, that short centar could have been days. As the last of his Cylon targets exploded into silent metal shards, Apollo permitted himself a sigh of relief. A search of his scanner showed no more enemy ships in the area.

"That looks like it," he heard a voice say. "A few ran, but I think we got most of them..."

He leaned back, allowing himself a moment of relaxation before heading back to his ship. His neck and shoulder muscles protested as he rested against the seat, and he had to work to unclench the muscles of his left hand, which still tightly clutched the joystick. He let his chin drop and his shoulders sag in an effort to get the tension to flow out of his too-taut body. It would be good to get back...

But it wouldn't be much of a break. He'd have combat statistics to gather, a report on the battle to fill out, casualties to list... He gritted his teeth in impotent rage -- that he couldn't just fall back into his disturbed sleep, but must be at the call of computer terminals, statistics forms, and his own grief and exhaustion, which he knew would set in when the natural chemical energy of combat wore off.

And now the frakkin' condition alert'll last even longer!

He snarled as he turned his Viper for home. Being Flight Commander could be a real pain; sometimes duty and rank pushed him to the wall, and he wanted so much to strike back at it all... Of course, his current short fuse wouldn't do him honour in any situation. He tried to let the anger melt away with the tension as he flew home, knowing weariness would replace it.

"Captain Apollo?"

"Here, Corporal," he answered Rigel's voice with as much grace and alacrity as he could muster.

"Commander Adama wishes to see you as soon as you land."

"I'll report to the bridge immediately."

"The Commander will meet you in the briefing room, Captain."

"Acknowledged. Thanks, Rigel."

"You are cleared for landing, Captain. Core Command out."

Silently wondering what had gone wrong this time, Apollo turned his attention to an unusually sloppy landing.

* * * * *

The Captain strode into the briefing room, where Commander Adama already awaited his arrival. They were alone, he noted at once with sudden dread. This isn't just formal business-as-usual. Something serious is wrong, something that involves me personally. Has someone been killed in the attack? Athena? Boxey? Some close friend? The nightmare at the edge of his mind returned to claw a toehold in his conscious thoughts.

"I'm here, Commander, as you ordered."

"Sit down, Apollo." His father sounded haggard. The last few days had been harsh and draining on him, too -- but the Commander's exhaustion seemed to sink into his very soul.

"What is it, father?"

Adama took a deep breath and looked up at him. "We think we've finally analyzed the Cylon attack strategy."

Apollo was puzzled. "That's good, isn't it? We can defend against it..."

The older man shook his head slowly, as if every yahren and every tear and pain of those yahrens was now hanging from chains around his throat.

"We're too late, Apollo. They've already succeeded."

He felt a chill, and answered in a whisper. "What have they done? Haven't we any chance, any hope left?" A wave of weary despair washed over him. All their efforts since the Destruction -- was it all for nothing?

Adama clasped his hands. "Sit down, Apollo. You have a mission to perform, perhaps the most important mission of your career, and certainly the saddest..."

The Captain slowly moved to a chair, his eyes fastened on his father's.

"The Cylons apparently intended to take captives in the attack. In the first, they failed -- you drove them off, with casualties, but they took no prisoners. The second time..." He took another deep breath. Apollo could see tears burning his father's eyes; it was hard for him to speak. "A shuttle travelling at the rear of the Fleet was forced away from our ships. That shuttle is now moving away from us in the midst of a Cylon fighter convoy. We're still tracking them, but it won't be for long.

"Apollo, we can't risk letting the personnel aboard that shuttle fall into Cylon hands for interrogation. We will follow them, at a discreet distance, but it will be up to you and some of your best men to carry out these orders."

"What are the orders?" He tried to be professional. It wasn't easy to leave any humans in Cylon captivity, but he didn't see how their very survival depended on them...

"Free that shuttle -- or bring it down. Use whatever means you have to."

He was stunned. "What? Destroy one of our own... Why?"

"Captain Apollo, one of the men on that shuttle is a high-ranking officer in this Fleet. He is one of the few who know the coordinates of our secret destination. He knows our crews, our combat personnel and strength. He could betray us -- and Earth, as well. He cannot be allowed to divulge what he knows to the enemy -- not with all humanity riding on it. If you can't free him, you must kill him."

Apollo was numb. He nodded his head jerkily. This would not be a pleasant mission. But the Commander was right -- there was too much at stake for any other choice.

He rose slowly. "I'll choose my strike team."

"There's something else you should know, so it doesn't come as a surprise later, so you truly know what you're doing, my son. The man you may have to kill...is Colonel Tigh."

* * * * *

The faces of the score or so Warriors making up the strike team betrayed the same anguish and horror Apollo had felt when he learned Colonel Tigh was a Cylon prisoner. He could give them as little comfort as the Commander had given him. They had a mission to carry out, and they had to act almost immediately -- follow the Cylons, locate their base, and either rescue or destroy that shuttle, and the man with it.

"But the Colonel..." Apollo'd never seen such shock on Starbuck's face.

"As the Commander pointed out, we don't have much choice. We can't risk letting the Cylons interrogate him. He knows too much. There's too much riding on it now -- not just us, but Earth as well."

"The Colonel wouldn't tell them anything!" Sheba insisted defiantly, eloquent tears streaking her cheeks.

He stared levelly at her. "So you'd rather leave him to them, to see how long he can last? Given a choice, I think he'd prefer a quick and merciful death, even at our hands, to the agony of Cylon methods. I'm sure the Colonel knows what we have to do, and understands."

There was silence in the room. The strike team saw the necessity, much as individuals might try to deny it emotionally. There was no need for further questions. Now, it was time to act.

* * * * *

"Colonel, what do we do?"

Tigh stared bleakly out the port, watching the flight formation of their accompanying Raiders. Simply quieting the terrified passengers of the shuttle had been a major effort when the Cylons swept down on them from nowhere. Now, they were obviously being taken somewhere -- and he could guess for what purpose. His lips compressed tightly as he considered the value of this small group of people in the eyes of their metal foes -- civilians, mostly simple technicians, male and female, and two small children. He was the only Warrior aboard.

And he was the one the Cylons would want alive.

The shuttle was a civilian craft; it wasn't armed. They couldn't strike a blow in their own defence, however futile a gesture it might be. It wasn't fair. These people looked to him for protection and orders to save their lives. And there was nothing he could do.

"The GALACTICA must know of our plight by now. I'm sure they've dispatched fighters after us," he told the shuttle pilot, trying to be as reassuring as possible, although he cynically doubted the battlestar could afford to waste manpower, fuel, or equipment to chase them down. They were doomed.

But his words seemed to ease the civilian's fears, just as they'd settled the hysteria of the passengers. If the GALACTICA came after them, they were sure that, somehow, they would be safe. He couldn't tell them otherwise, not in any definition of kindness. But is it fair to let them think they'll be rescued, when I know they're all going to die?

"I'm sure the Cylons will force us to land somewhere," he told them. "I doubt our Vipers will attack when we might be hit. When we land, stay low, women and children behind the seats. We don't want to antagonize the Cylons into shooting when rescue might be only centons away. If they unload us, we must all do what we think is best for our own survival, and that of our fellow passengers. The Cylons will certainly kill us if we resist." And probably if we don't.

There were murmurs among the civilians, and some doubtful glances, but everyone seemed willing to do as he told them. He hoped he'd suggested the right thing. If only there were some way to fight, even knowing we can't win...

He shuddered, thinking of what he knew of Cylon "interrogation" techniques and devices. Mulling over the probable questions -- and the answers he might be coerced into supplying -- Colonel Tigh reached the conclusion that he could not permit himself to be captured alive. The question, of course, was how to prevent that occurrence.

* * * * *

The Cylons vanished into the asteroid field of a nearby star system. It was a perfect hiding place. Apollo was in despair; they could search for yahrens, and never locate a hidden base.

But the Colonials got lucky. The shuttle pilot, whoever he was, kept trying to transmit a distress signal. The Cylons had to keep scrambling that signal, and the GALACTICA was able to narrow down the source of the resulting static. With that as a guide, the Viper pilots tracked the Cylons through the asteroids to an inner planetoid. By the time the signal went silent -- with all that silence implied about the fate of the small craft's occupants -- they knew the general location of the base.

"What now, Captain?" Sheba asked.

"Shut down the base, especially the communications equipment and launch facilities," he replied, hoping his voice sounded steadier than hers. "That'll give us time to search without their revealing our presence or striking back when we're on the ground."

"They'll kill those people before they let us rescue them," added Starbuck fatalistically.

"Then at least we've bought them that much." Maybe we'll get lucky. Sure, and maybe the Imperious Leader'll volunteer to be our target on the laser range. "Knock out their scanners, too. Maybe they won't know we're here; it'll give us a little bit of an edge."

* * * * *

Tigh was sick. The civilians never had a chance. Even the children were slaughtered, as efficiently and as immediately as the Cylons always killed humans, from the most dangerous Warrior to the most helpless infant. The twisting of his stomach came from rage at having to watch the

blood-bath, as well as from the chemicals he'd swallowed. It was only a matter of time.

Fortunately, it hadn't occurred to the metal monsters to use the civilians as hostages against his compliance.

Tigh was hustled away from the empty shuttle and the bloody landing area around it. From the sound and the speed with which his captors rushed him, something was happening. Surely the GALACTICA isn't risking a rescue attempt...

He felt rather than heard the vibrations that meant laser fire was striking somewhere.

* * * * *

The Colonial Warriors wiped out the base's defensive capabilities with their first salvos. They pinpointed the landing field where the shuttle had been brought down, but didn't risk firing near it; the prisoners, if any, might still be held nearby, and keeping the area airtight might give them a better chance of staying alive. Instead, the Warriors concentrated their fire on other strategic strongholds.

When all resistance had apparently been destroyed, Apollo ordered his attack force to the ground.

"Do you really think that's necessary, Captain?" Starbuck asked. "When the Cylons realized what we were doing, they must've killed anybody who survived this long. We won't find any human survivors."

"Maybe not. But we have to confirm Colonel Tigh's identity. We can't leave any chance that the Cylons might get the coordinates to Earth. And maybe, just maybe, the Colonel had a chance to get away when we attacked. We can't leave him here for the next base star that patrols this quadrant." He sensed silent agreement, and a small bit of hope, from the others. Some of them might die in the search, but they might be lucky enough to rescue the civilians -- and the one Warrior who had been aboard the shuttle. It was also more personally satisfying to complete the destruction of the Cylon base face-to-face with the enemy. Apollo realized his order was against standard procedure, and might even be foolhardy -- but in this instance, they had to be sure.

There were perhaps half a dozen functional Cylons in the landing bay when the humans invaded; they were soon dispatched. When the Warriors encountered the gruesome, gory site of the shuttle massacre, they turned their lasers on the hated mechanicals until there was literally nothing left of them but small puddles of slag. After a brief, nauseating search, they learned Tigh's body wasn't among the unfortunate civilians. Then, their expressions grim and sickly, they split up into smaller parties and fanned out into the holding area, leaving a handful of guards over their own craft.

Apollo, Boomer, Starbuck, and Jolly paced warily through empty stone corridors carved into the planetoid. The stone was laced with veins of metal, some of it valuable, although the Cylons ignored the treasure that had frequently adorned the homes and persons of rich men and women in the Colonies. Amidst all the wealth, the Colonials walked carefully, hoping their echoing footfalls didn't attract unwanted attention. When they came to a branching of the sterile, well-lit hall, they conferred for a few moments before splitting up further, Apollo and Starbuck going to the left, while Boomer and Jolly went to the right.

"Stay in communications range," the Captain cautioned as they separated. "This stone might absorb our radio signals and interfere with our communications equipment."

In a few moments, Apollo and Starbuck reached a sealed metal hatch with Cylon script across it.

The door fit solidly into the floor and walls, giving no clue to what might lie behind it.

"Damn!" Apollo whispered. The place sent eerie shudders down his back, and he kept looking back, expecting to be followed. "For all we know, this might open into their command centre."

Starbuck studied the stencilled lettering closely. "No! Remember when I was captured at Kobol, Apollo? This looks like the same writing they had on the door of their detention chambers. I think this must be where they hold their prisoners!"

"What if you're wrong?"

"One way to find out!"

"You're the gambler."

Starbuck smiled grimly, and turned the round handle. There was no whoosh of escaping air; whatever lay beyond was pressurized. Between them, the two men hauled the heavy metal door open and slipped through.

"More deserted corridors!" Apollo muttered, with growing foreboding.

"A double row of cells," was Starbuck's contribution. "If they've got any prisoners, they're here, Apollo."

"I'll start checking the cells. You call Boomer and Jolly, and let them know what we found. If the Colonel's alive, he should be around here somewhere."

"Should we try calling to him?"

"And risk alerting any surviving Cylons? Or have him betray his hiding place, when they might be looking for him -- and us? No." Apollo left Starbuck standing at the door as he began making his way down the long row of small, impersonal cells.

He found nothing. All the cells were locked, but opened easily -- and all of them were empty. At the end of the row, the corridor turned, leading off to the left. There were more chambers down that way. Looking back at his friend, Apollo gestured to indicate the direction he was taking. Starbuck waved back, to tell him Boomer and Jolly were on their way. With a nod of understanding, the Captain moved on.

The first three cells were as empty as the others. In the fourth, he found the object of their search.

"Colonel!" The young man ran to crouch over the the huddled body of his superior officer.

Tigh was curled into a tight ball in the corner opposite the door, facing the chiselled stone wall. When Apollo tried to turn him over, he saw the man's face was discoloured, with an unusual grey-blue pallor under the dark brown complexion. His skin was cold, but beaded with an unnatural sweat. His hands were balled into tight fists, his mouth contorted in pain. Blood clotted his nostrils and lips.

"Colonel!" What have they done...?

Bloodshot eyes forced themselves open to stare at him. For a moment, Apollo thought the man didn't recognize him; then Tigh spoke.

"Apollo..." he breathed in agonized gasps. "Didn't...take you...too?"

"No! We're here to rescue you." He tried to pull the older man into his arms, to carry him away from the cell that seemed to scream of torture and death. "What did they do to you, sir?"

Tigh moaned, and pulled away from him. "Nothing...Apollo. Nothing they...did. Knew I...couldn't let them...question me...so I drank a...bit of engine lubricant... Tylium-derived...you know. Knew it was...poison, but didn't think...would take this long..."

"We'll get you back to the GALACTICA. You'll be all right," the younger man insisted, trying to reassure him. But he was appalled, realizing they were likely too late. He'd been taught that ingested tylium, in any of several forms, caused an ugly death; he'd never thought to witness it.

Tigh smiled, a ghastly stretching of his face that brought more blood; then he coughed. "No. It...burns, Apollo. Burns...like fire. Help...me." He reached for the young man's laser, missed.

The Captain fell back, appalled. "What...?"

"Can't...live, Apollo. Get it...over with...now. Please."

"But..."

"Tell your father...thanks...for trying... Good luck, wherever...we wind up...on whatever... world." He gasped as a fresh wave of pain curled his body into a futilely protective ball around his stomach, the source of his agony. His hand tightened on Apollo's wrist in a death grip.

The young man was shaking. "You're asking me to... I can't!"

"Please. Don't...make me wait...and suffer...any more. Didn't tell...Cylons anything. Get it...over." He seemed to find a last reserve of strength, and pulled Apollo closer, meeting his gaze with a fierce effort.

Tigh was dying; Apollo could see that. And there was nothing he could do. He couldn't let his father's friend -- his friend -- endure any more than he already had. The Colonel didn't have the strength to pull the trigger himself; he would have to perform that last favour, although it would rip his heart, and perhaps stain his soul beyond renewal. A friend s death, at his hands, although begged for, might be an act of mercy -- or it might be the unforgivable condemnation. How can I tell my father...?

Tears blurred his vision as he drew his laser. "Colonel? Forgive me..."

The older man's voice breathed a grateful sigh as the Captain aimed with trembling fingers. Apollo squeezed his eyes tightly shut as his finger depressed the trigger...

* * * * *

"No!" Starbuck screamed as he fired at the Cylon centurion standing in the hall. It fell in a pile of short-circuiting metal parts. The Lieutenant ran to the door of the cell the Cylon had stood before; he drew up short. "Lords, no..."

He fell to his knees, and began to cry.

* * * * *

"Boomer and Starbuck found the Colonel's body," Greenbean reported. "They're bringing him back. Call in the others; we got what we came for." His expression was haggard and depressed; he'd hoped, against the odds, that they'd be lucky enough to find the Colonel alive.

It wasn't long before the Warriors were gathered together in the Cylon landing bay. Only Apollo, Starbuck, Boomer, and Jolly were missing -- and they were bringing back Colonel Tigh's body.

"There!" The others looked up at Bojay's call.

They saw Boomer first, walking very slowly, with the dead weight of the Colonel's body over his shoulder in a fireman's carry. His face was strained, and he carefully averted his eyes from the carnage surrounding the shuttle as he joined his comrades.

"Where's the Captain? And the others? Covering the rear?" the tall, blond Greenbean inquired.

Boomer shook his head sadly, tears running freely down his cheeks. "Get the Colonel into the shuttle; we're taking the bodies back." They'd already loaded the civilian bodies, wrapped in thermo-blankets.

In a moment, the others came out of the dark corridor. The waiting Warriors gasped when they saw Apollo draped over the heavy-set Jolly's shoulders; Starbuck brought up the rear, his weapon drawn. They gathered in stunned silence as the Sergeant lowered his burden to the cold stone floor.

"He's..." Starbuck couldn't continue, merely bowed his head in the depths of his grief. He'd been too late.

Sheba knelt over the still body, shaking with the force of her tears.

"Someone's gonna have to tell the Commander what this mission cost," Jolly said softly. "The Colonel, and the Skipper..."

No one else had anything to say. The only sound in the otherwise silent landing bay was a blonde woman's sobs of grief.

"The Enemy"

(By Karen Klinck)

Cold, metallic, unknowable aliens,
Yesterday's and tomorrow's foes.
Lifeless -- yet living.
Machines of war
Out to annihalate the human race.
No mercy will be shown;
Ships of death hang over the Colonies.

ALEXANDRA'S DIARY: The Great Stuffed Theodore Caper

It's been a marvellous day. I finally put into operation a little idea that's been floating around in my head for quite some time, with Captain Diana's unsuspecting and unintentional "assistance." Actually, though, the assistance came from something I found in her quarters after that little foray at Kobol.

I'm sure anybody hearing this remembers Arion. He's the kid who saved us when we got back to the Colonies. See, he'd been a prisoner on a Cylon base star. He was originally from the COLUMBIA, but the Cylons captured him during the destruction of the Fleet, after his base ship was destroyed. He convinced them he was ready to sell out the OSIRIS in exchange for power in the Cylon Empire, so they released him as bait in a trap. He warned us about their plan, almost got killed for it, but one of our pilots talked him in to safety -- Periander, who also became his wingman after we slipped away again.

Ever since then, he's been almost as bad a thorn in my side as Lucas. No, Thorn, not you! Get out of here!

He calls me "Aley," which even my closest friends don't do. As a matter of fact, only one person I've ever known has successfully gotten away with calling me that...

And Arion interferes in things, too. Like the time Daphne and I gave Captain Diana the statue of that GALACTICA pilot -- an old friend, or lover, or somebody special like that -- and he had to get into the act.

That was when I found out about a certain little brown creature which played such a major role in today's entertainment. Poor Arion...

Anyway, to make the story good, I took my "borrowed" assistant and made a visit to Viper Launch Bay Alpha, the home of Purple and Orange Squadrons. Green Squadron and our shuttle contingent usually have control of Beta Bay, though we occasionally invade each other's territory. We visited Arion s Viper, settled innocently in its cradle, just waiting for the patrol Arion and Periander had later in the day.

To provide myself with an alibi for the appropriate time, I then stopped to visit Trav, not having seen much of her since she took her pregnancy leave. She had a boy, incidentally, and named him Meric, after her brother. He looks like her. She'll be back in the squadron before long, I think.

Anyway, she was supposed to be my alibi. I was sure she'd agree to it, but I couldn't ask her. Captain Laia and Major Meret were also visiting her, and since they've both had children themselves in the last yahren, they were full of helpful advice on how to be a good Warrior mother. It was cute, I guess, but I found it a bit disgusting, the way the three of them were cooing at each other.

I made myself a promise, then and there, never to inflict cooing on any children of mine. Meret

just smiled and shook her head when she heard me.

I left shortly, and headed for Sentiology. If Freya was there, I knew -- or was reasonably certain -- that I could count on her help, or Daphne's. Neither one seems to harbour any great love for Arion, or any desire to defend him.

Just my luck, neither of them was around, just Tanis and Kari Shadowstar, that strange lady we picked up a few sectars ago. Tanis promptly put me to work carrying things around for them, since they were busy documenting materials. Last of the Byzel stuff, I believe.

I figured it was a good alibi. Kari doesn't understand our time units very well yet, and if asked, Tanis would say something vague about my helping out all day in the labs.

My little joke intensified into a very big joke when some marauders chose to attack one of our patrols this afternoon. The patrol naturally reported back to base what they were running from, and Commander Christopher naturally sent the squadrons out to deal with the pirates.

Arion's hitch-hiker did its job beautifully. Wherever Arion flew, a little something trailed along behind, just a few feet from the upper delta wing...

I'll never forget today's battle chatter! Poor Arion. I almost feel sorry for him. After all, he couldn't engage an enemy the whole time; they kept flying at him, then breaking off and disappearing. Our own pilots kept asking him what in Hades he'd done to his ship, and he didn't have the foggiest idea what they were talking about -- and told them so, in no uncertain terms.

It wasn't until we got back, after the pirates had fled -- probably due to Arion, more than anything! -- that the rest of the crew found out what was happening.

Our three squadron leaders were lined up waiting for Arion to land. Apparently, they'd all gotten a good look at his ship during the combat. He came in safely, and went to cneck out his tail. Then he tried to disappear, when he found out what was there.

Strangely enough, the young Sergeant had a large stuffed animal trailing behind his Viper -- fortunately, none the worse for its excursion. (I knew what I was doing when I tied it there; we couldn't have the little critter burning up on launch!) He'd already cut the wires and held the large stuffed brown creature tightly; he was trying to sneak out of the landing bay without being seen. No such luck.

"Sergeant," Captain Diana drawled mildly, sneaking up behind him (well, it seemed like sneaking to him. Actually, I think she was stalking him!), "it seems you had a rather unorthodox ship today. Might I enquire just what it was you added to your Viper's streamlined and very efficient design? Did it better the craft's performance? Perhaps by adding an element of surprise?"

Arion's face was redder than I've ever seen it before, and I've certainly seen some prime blushes on him. He was still trying to hide the thing behind his back, but Diana wouldn't be dissuaded. She held out her hand insistently, glaring at him. The rest of us gathered around, with Laia and Talos backing up Diana. Even some of the Viper techs had heard something was going on, and they wanted to know what it was.

Finally, after a last desperate, appealing glance, seeing there was no escape from our implacable Captain, Arion surrendered the stuffed creature to our flight leader.

Diana froze in utter disbelief. It was her very own Theodore, who had somehow left the security of her quarters to take a little flight into battle. Arion sidled forward and plunked it into her

arms, then retreated. I don't think Diana could think of anything to say, and she was getting a bit red herself.

Arion must've thought she was <u>really</u> angry. He started insisting, "But it's not <u>mine</u>, Captain!"

Diana swallowed and took a deep breath. "No, I'm sure it's not," she finally agreed. "I trust we will not see this creature accompanying you in the future?"

I don't think I've ever seen Arion disappear so fast. The micron Diana's gaze swept from him -- and seemed to settle on <u>me</u>, for some reason -- Cassandra appeared out of the crowd, grabbed his arm, and whisked him away. If rumours are true, I'm sure she...<u>consoled</u> him for the incident. She's good for him.

At any rate, Captain Diana was left standing in the landing bay with a Theodore in her hands. Captain Talos finally stepped forward, took it from her, held it up, and boomed to all and sundry, "Will anyone acknowledge being the proud mother or father of this creature?"

That broke everybody up, especially me, after my visit to Trav's maternity convention.

When we'd all quieted down again, Talos shrugged and, with a courtly bow, handed the thing back to Diana. "I guess it's yours, then, fair lady." If she'd had anything else in her hands, she'd have thrown it.

"Diana," Captain Laia cut in, "if you don't know what to do with it, Sarah Jane could use a new toy. We've no way of getting any proper ones, and a stuffed animal would be nice for her." Sarah Jane is Laia's daughter, and she's a bit odd. She's got a wide, peculiar smile that makes people look twice, and huge blue eyes, and she's not afraid of anybody or anything. I don't know where Laia got the name. <u>Names</u>.

Our Captain tried to smile. "Sure."

Laia got custody, but I imagine that's only temporary. If Diana kept it all these yahrens, she won't let it go that easily. She just couldn't bring herself to own up to it in front of everybody. They'll work it out later, I'm sure.

The rest of us chose to vanish about then, and some of us wound up in the pilots' lounge. A group was playing pyramid when Gregory brought over a round of M'dori and started snickering when he saw me. I was only watching the game, so I took the time to give him my most innocent gaze, which probably wasn't very convincing.

"How'd you do it?" he asked.

"How'd I do <u>what</u>?"

"Get that thing on Arion's ship. I asked the tech who checked the Viper out for pre-flight, and she said it wasn't there when she was done. Ergo..." Gregory knows me too well, I think. That's what happens when you fly with somebody for yahrens.

"I was in Sentiology all day," I insisted.

"Right -- like Hades. I repeat, how'd you do it? And where'd you get 'Theodore'?" He was still chuckling, and most of the people at the table began grinning dementedly, obviously expecting an amusing explanation.

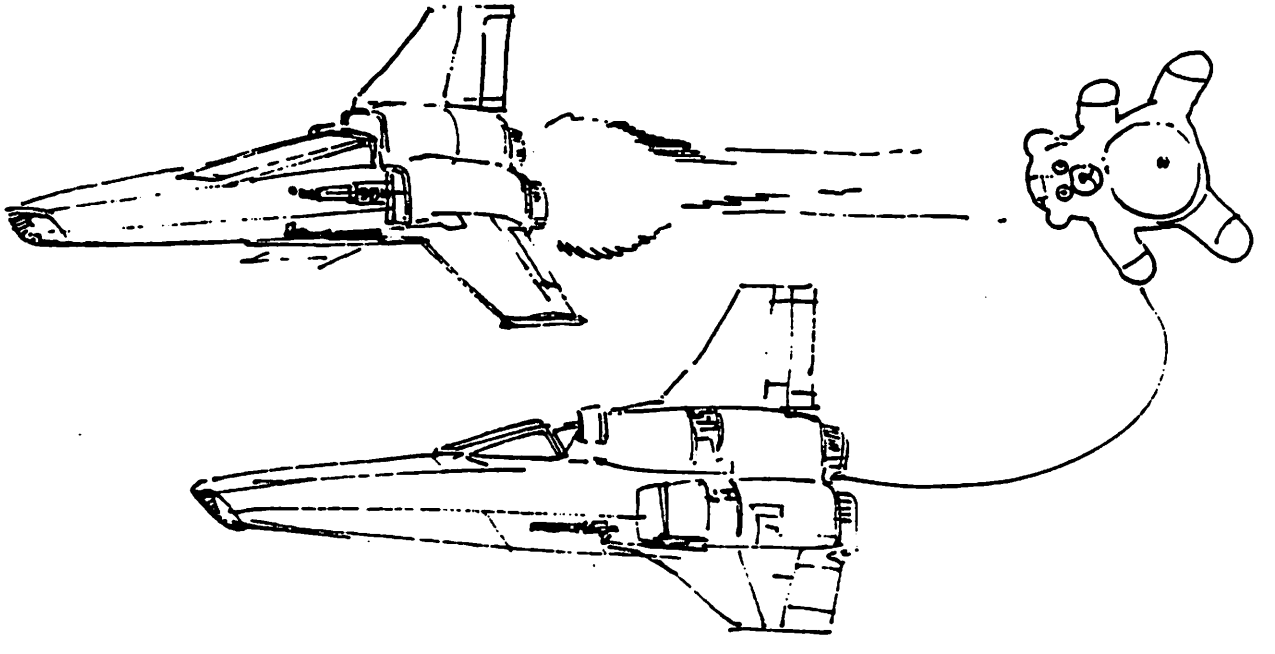
"But she was!" Freya spoke up in my defence, quite unexpectedly. "We were both there, the whole duty shift. Now, are we going to drink that M'dori, or do you want it to evaporate while we sit here?" Her usual dry wit.

It puzzled everybody there, since they were all sure I was responsible. I gave Gregory our private signal that meant I'd explain later, and followed Freya when she left.

She brought up the subject before I could. Said she'd already talked to Kari, and everything was clear. I was suspicious, as I always am when Freya talks about covering for somebody without having her arm twisted.

Then she unexpectedly brought up the subject of Clem.

I may be interested in what Freya was doing that we're protecting each other for, but I am <u>not</u> crazy -- or suicidal. As far as I'm concerned, we <u>both</u> spent the day in Sentiology's domain. One thing I don't need to find in my quarters -- <u>ever!</u> -- is Clem without benefit of Freya!



Arlus.80

CAPTAIN, I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT SERGEANT ARION...

"Night Thoughts"

(By Mary Robertson)

They've said that I'm a hero,
Blessed with all the word implies --
With courage, and with daring,
And the caution of the wise.

But I'm nobody's hero --
Just an ordinary man,
And not always courageous,
Although I do the best I can.

I've tried to be a hero
In a quiet kind of way,
But the standard is perfection,
And the price too high to pay.

It's hard to be a hero,
For my best is not enough.
I bear the burden proudly,
But at times the road gets rough.

My people want a hero
They can pin their hopes upon.
How can I be their answer
When a part of me is gone?

Their hero lies here sleepless,
In an all-too-frequent rite,
With memories of losses
And mistakes to haunt his night.

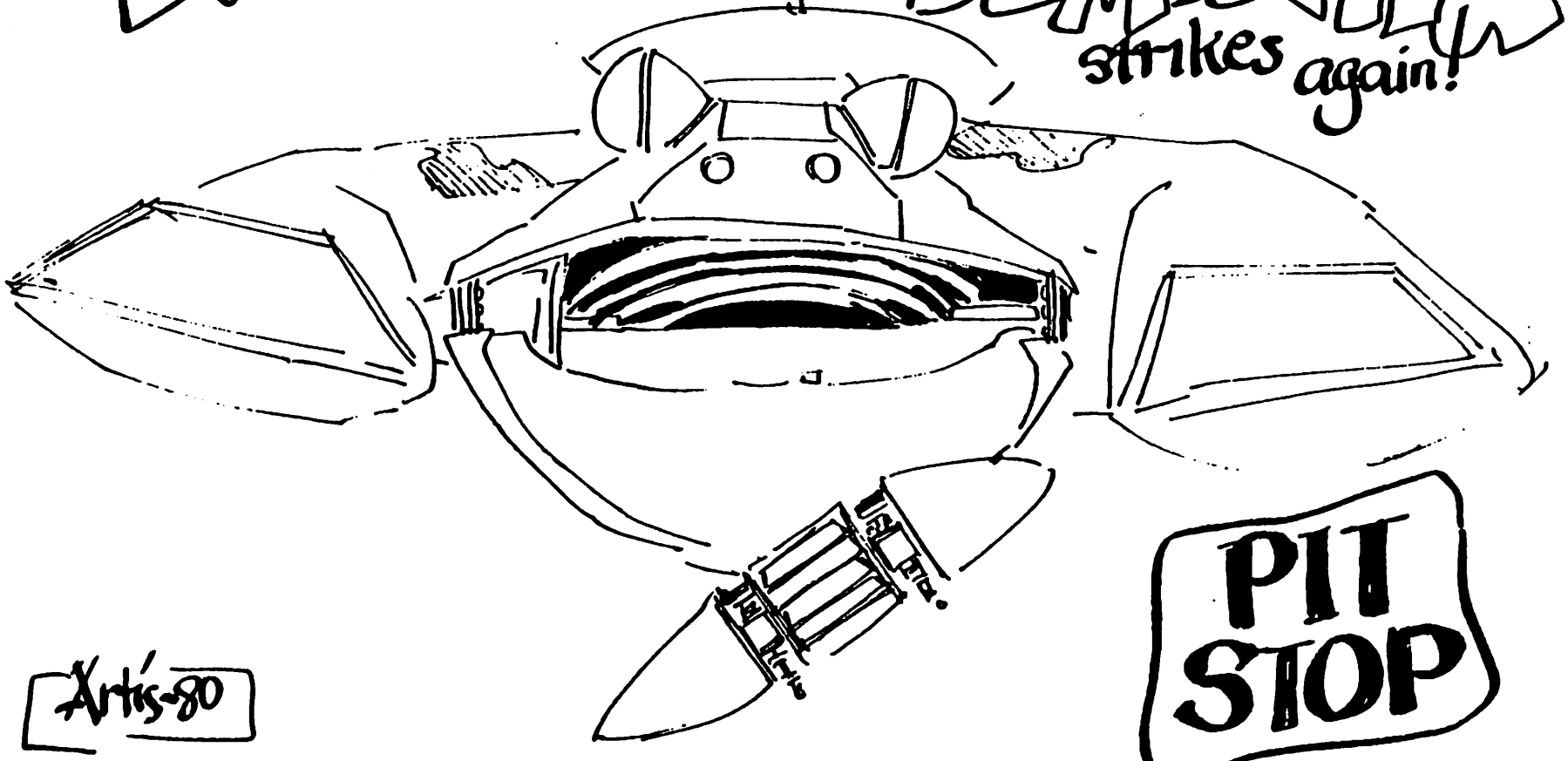
I know I'm not a hero,
And one day, I'll fail the test.
They've stolen all I cherish,
And they've left me without rest.

My people need their heroes,
So I try to fill the role.
But when we find our brothers...
Maybe then I'll find my soul.

Just when you thought it was safe to go into space—

BATTLEFROG DEMENTIA

strikes again!



Artis-80

"Pit Stop"

(By Clyde Jones and Robert Smerp)

Through the faintest fringes of an interstellar cloud hurtled the angular, haunting shape of a Cylon war craft. Feeble light from the red giant nestled within the contracting cloud glistened off its polished, vitrolith hull, and woke echoes in the louvered aperture of the command cockpit. Within the hooded orifice, two figures gentled their controls, keeping wary oculars on the flaming giant to their side.

The droning tones and grating dissonance of a Cylon centurian's voice echoed in the cockpit. "It-has-been-an-effective-manoeuvre. The-gravitational-well-of-the-giant-star-has-served-to-accelerate-our-vehicle-and-boost-us-well-on-our-way. Drag-from-the-nebulosity-is-minimal-and-easily-dissipated-by-the-shields. Perceptible-gains-have-been-achieved-by-this-manoeuvre."

"Who the frak programmed you, Cy? Can't you just say, 'gee, the slingshot manoeuvre worked, and the dust don't hold us back?' It's simpler, and doesn't take time from your pyramid game." The angular figure of the human was slouched casually in the port navigator's chair, feet propped between the navscope and the targeting computer. He pulled the remnants of his last stogie from between his lips and gestured widely. "Economy, Cy, economy. Don't talk when you can deal. But" -- his wide sweep with the stogie ended in the middle of the ship systems readout display panel with a dull fump and splat -- "once you deal, then keep talking to get their minds off the cards.

"You listening to me, Cy?" Starbuck leaned forward to stare toward, if not into, Cy's roving ruby ocular. "Here I am, trying to bestow upon my good old Cylon friend twenty yahrens of hard-won knowledge, and he ignores me.

"Cy?"

"Please-correct-me-if-I-am-wrong-Starbuck-but-is-this-not-the-pattern-of-one-of-your-Colonial-homing-beacons?" Tilting in his chair, the chrome and ebon figure punched a button, and an odd, swirling pattern appeared in the navscope before Starbuck.

"Holy Mother of Fortran, you're right, Cy! We're found!" The somewhat scrungy, bewhiskered figure in Colonial Warrior's garb executed a most unlikely lunge toward his astonished companion, and began to swing him around the cockpit. Or, rather, began to try. Cramped being the kindest term for the area, he hardly succeeded, but he tried.

"We're found! We're back, we're back! We found 'em, Cy!" chortled the human in a rather demented tone.

"You-may-be-back-Starbuck. I-am-not. How-will-your-human-friends-react-to-a-Cylon-centurian? You-may-not-be-able-to-explain-me-away-as-a-Colonial-with-a-chrome-plate-job." The grating voice died away, as did Starbuck's chortles.

"Oh, don't worry, Cy. Just let me handle it. I'll manage something. They'll listen to good ol' Starbuck." He began busily punching little buttons while he babbled to Cy. Odd symbols came and went on the navscreen. "What I don't understand is why a Colonial ship would be broadcasting like this. If it were a real Colonial, they'd be shut down really tight." His cheerful tone was fast ebbing. "Unless they had a big problem. Even then..." His voice vanished into mumbles as he and Cy both tried to extract more information from the screen.

"Y'know, Cy, I think it's more likely we've found your family than mine."

"I-disagree-Starbuck. This-wave-pattern-does-not-match-Cylon-transmission-patterns." Cy touched a control, and the composite signal fragmented into a nest of dancing electrical snakes. "This-pattern-is-typical-of-Colonial-transmissions." He touched another control, and another single trace was added to the ones on the screen. "This-is-the-transform-typical-of-Cylon-equipment-and-is-not-removable from-this-apparatus."

Cy turned to the human. "That-is-a-state-secret. It-must-not-be-revealed-to-anyone. It-would-prevent-our-people-from-duping-yours-into-sneaky-treacherous-traps-of-the-kind-our-Imperious-Leader-is-so-fond-of. Centurians-of-course-prefer-a-more-honourable-confrontation."

"Er, sure, Cy. I won't tell a soul. But...could you show me that again?"

"Certainly-Starbuck. I-trust-your-discretion." Cy handed Starbuck a hard copy printout of the composite, with the tell-tale trace in red. "Knowing-humans-and-their-infallible-memories-I-think-you-will-find-this-handy." Cy's voice couldn't show emotional changes, but Starbuck got the distinct impression of massive irony. "In-case-we-get-separated."

Starbuck left the printout bridging the gap between them. He stared into Cy's ocular. "We won't get separated, buddy. I had a Hades of a hard time getting you back together last time. Don't want to do it again."

"Affirmative-Starbuck. I-would-hate-to-have-to-make-sense-of-your-squishy-state-circuitry-myself-if-you-were-damaged." Cy returned the stare for another moment, then turned toward the navscreen. "According-to-the-data-we-are-on-an-interception-course-with-the-unknown. It-would-be-wasteful-to-lose-the-momentum-gained-by-the-slung-shot-manoeuvre."

"Slung-shot. Right. Onward and ever upward, ol' shiny one." Starbuck slung his feet back into position atop the control console. "And be sure and wake me if anything happens, will ya? Think I'll take a nap." With that, Starbuck tilted his head sideways and began to snore.

"Humans. Half-their-time-sleeping-and-the-other-half-playing-cards. When-do-they-manage-their-lengthy-method-of-reproduction?" Cy shook his glittering head in seeming dismay, a gesture picked up from Starbuck.

"Don't worry, Cy. We manage," came the sleepy mutter from the recumbent Colonial.

* * * * *

"What in the name of the Perfect Pyramid is <u>that</u>?" blathered Starbuck.

<u>That</u> looked like a cross between a Viper and a large rock, with guns.

"According-to-our-record-file-that-is-a-Gnat-Type-Six-obsolete-in-nature. Still-highly-functional. Your-discontinuance-of-that-series-aided-us-considerably. We-could-then-use-lighter-shields-and-lighter-weapons. Vipers-are-showy-but-light." Now, Cy's voice sounded smug. Impossible, of

course.

"That thing's one of ours?" asked Starbuck.

"No. One-of-yours." Cy turned and looked at him.

Starbuck was getting the feeling the metal-head was developing a sense of humour. A warped sense of humour. What had he wired in backward? The carburator?

Whatever, the ungainly gunmobile was ignoring them. Which was not right.

"Oh, well, here goes nothing. Lieutenant Starbuck to unknown ship, request escort to your base. We are human, and friendly. At least, one of us is human. Or friendly."

"Escort your own damn self, sonny. I got a patrol to run, and no one is gonna get me back on that thing until I'm out of fuel." The voice was old, quavering, but quite definite. With that cryptic comment, the odd mass kicked in its boosters and vanished into the void as if it had been fired from a gun.

"What the frak...?" He and Cy looked at each other. "Someone is crazy around here..."

"True," fired back Cy. "And-so-is-someone-on-that-Gnat." With that, he punched in his own boosters, and the Cylon warcraft roared off toward the source of the beacon.

That wasn't the only patrol they encountered on their way to the mystery station. Most of the others ignored them, except for those that asked if they'd seen anything to shoot at. Starbuck said, "No," innocently enough, as he and Cy watched a weird procession of Gnats, Vipers, Cylon craft -- with Gnat gun turrets, in most cases -- and other completely unidentifiable vehicles motivating around in space near the strange signal source.

And the source...

"Cy, that thing's gotta be one of yours. We'd never build anything that ugly." Starbuck sounded scandalized. The ship they finally approached was strange. Putting it mildly, it was strange. Putting it honestly, it was arcane. A giant frog of deep space, with an adamantine skin and a dish antenna array on its back. And the landing bay...

"I-must-commend-your-people-Starbuck. It-takes-great-character-to-build-and-fly-something-like-this. Also-great-lunacy." Cy was busily aligning the warcraft on the landing bay. Starbuck was having nothing to do with the manoeuvre. He was not about to have any part of flying into what looked like the mouth of a giant bug-eater, with a metallic tongue that looked preposterously like a standard Colonial corvette.

"We-have-received-landing-permission-and-are-going-in. Affirmative?" Cy turned to Starbuck and appraised the look of resignation on his face. Their ship glided into the grinning aperture.

Little blinking lights guided them to a slightly singed and battered landing pit. Starbuck looked out the port and saw a flock of Cylons waiting. "Oh, boy, Cy, they look like your people. Why don't you go out and talk to them? Maybe get us some fuel, and then let's scram. Okay?"

"Perhaps-you-are-right-Starbuck. They-may-actually-be-in-charge-here. This-might-be-a-trap-for-Colonials."

With that cheery comment, Cy raised the exit hatch and toppled gracelessly out.

"Roger, roger, good buddy, the good ol' boys of Refuelling Crew Thirty-Six are here at the ol' pit stop to refuel yer ship in jest a jiffy, polish the plates, clean the bugs offen yer glass, an' see to yer air while chek'n yer guns an' expendables an' keepin' watch for any little problems that might jest creep up to spoil yer day an' otherwise keep our finest fighting men an' 'lons in action against any threat by those sneaky, nasty, un-reprogrammed critters from out of our home-land. To lead an' convert, if not to destroy the unhallowed an' convert all good red-eyes to peace an' brotherhood -- hallelujah, brother! -- an' the way of co-existence an' cooperation, for as the leader says, 'teamwork makes the day go an' makes life long,' and we-all here..." The leader of the maintenance crew launched into a constant stream of verbiage -- and such verbiage! -- while Cy stood stunned.

Such an outpouring of words might be expected of a human, but a Cylon? He finally noticed a few humans working around the cavernous area, along with the Cylons.

Entranced by the avalanche of monologue, Starbuck stuck his head out of the hatch. One of the other Cylons -- one with a conservative green banding around his thorax, rather than the crew chief's paisley of mauve and vermillion -- peered around at him. "Anyth'ng else, bub?" he grated.

"Er...cigars? Ambrosia, external fuel tanks, veeb-steaks?" fired back the confused Warrior.

"Right, bub," grated the Cylon. "Hey, Harvey..." he bellowed toward a century-old human in a gadget combining all the grace and efficiency of a wheelchair and a fork-lift. "Gimme a hand."

Starbuck began to retreat before an upwelling of cases. "And a full maintenance kit for my buddy, here!" he called, as the flood swept him back against the wall.

"Yeah."

It was several centons before he could free himself from the ship to peer around the bay. Humans and Cylons? Mixed? Starbuck wandered away from their ship. One of the cases had proclaimed "veeb-steaks." His stomach suddenly growled. "Hey, Cy!" he yelled back. "Will you watch the ship? I've got another human need to take care of!"

He wandered over to an exit portal, wondering where the corridor led.

"Hey, bub, watch where you're going!" yelled a geriatric case shooting by on a turbo-powered wheelchair.

"Which way to the mess?" Starbuck called after him.

Surprisingly, it was a Cylon that answered him -- a Cylon with a small orange-and-purple thingie perched on its shoulder, which seemed to have a cluster of baby-blue occulars waving about. He followed the directions, and found himself entering a large room full of Warriors, Cylons, and...

Things? He wasn't really prepared for the man-sized orange rutabaga cooking madly in a blur of purple tentacles, while reading two cookbooks with a handful of little blue eyes. He also wasn't prepared for the low grumble emanating from the thing. It paused in its cooking for a bit, fumbled with what Starbuck finally recognized as a battered linguatron, and the bass rumbling changed to a neutral human-kind of voice. "Hi, guy. What you want to eat?"

"Well...whatever's cooked. I've been a long time without real food." Starbuck faded out a bit as a miniature replica of the cook came slithering down the wall, grabbed a critter-burger, and scampered back into the duct work. "What was that?"

"Irving. Likes those things. Irving, and half the crew. Irving is his human's name for him. Guy, you look like you could use a 'fresher. Over there." The critter waved a tentacle at an alcove. "Your grub'll be ready when you are."

"Grub?" Starbuck asked weakly. He wasn't sure how to take that.

"Veeb-steak okay? With cleebs and meem fruit?" the cook asked.

"Yeah. Sure. Right, fella..." Starbuck slid off toward the alcove.

His. Hers. Its. Theirs. Others. That was his interpretation of the universal washroom symbols on the myriad of doors. He gritted his teeth and tried the one marked "His."

He got lucky. With a happy sigh, he crossed to an empty locker, threw off his uniform, deposited it in the laundry, and ducked into the turboshower, luxuriating in the sheer human pleasure of warm water against his skin. Then he grabbed a new uniform. Clean. Untattered.

Then the Cylon valet appeared, offering him a shave and a haircut. He wasn't sure he wanted a Cylon with a razor to have access to his throat, but after rubbing his bewhiskered chin...

Later, fresh and clean-shaven, Starbuck wandered back into the mess hall, picked up a tray loaded to the groaning point, and staggered over to a table. Ignoring the other inhabitants, he began shovelling it in. Home, and good old home cooking. He ignored the form of the cook, and enjoyed the product thereof.

A small orange thingie plunked down into his meem fruit from some point on the ceiling. He picked it up, gently wiped off the worst of the mess, and handed him -- her? it? -- back to the wee beastie's apparent...keeper? Friend? Only when he had to reach <u>down</u> to hand it back did he notice the person doing the receiving. Short, very short, green, with enormous ears...

"Here you go. I hope the little...er...isn't hurt."

"Oh, hurt it is not. Hardy they are." The little one stared up at Starbuck. "Ah, the power you have about you. Great is its strength. Much have you yet to accomplish." It leaned closer, peering up past Starbuck's knee. "<u>But not here.</u>"

Then, settling its little friend, the small creature wandered out, muttering to the thing. "Great shall he become, little one. And you also, when you learn the ways of the..." The voice faded out, as did the little creature, glimmering and glowing into insubstantiality.

Uncertainly, Starbuck returned to his walked-in but still delicious meal.

* * * * *

Starbuck paced the halls, trying to find his way back to the landing bay. The ship seemed right enough, but he wasn't comfortable in it. He saw couples, families of three or four, also walking. He saw teams of humans, Cylons, and other things. They were in odd lots and unusual groupings. A Cylon walked down a corridor with a pretty human lady; they talked animatedly about coordinating attack techniques as they -- the two of them -- flew something unnameable. He saw two Cylons stomping off down another corridor, one with a little cook-type critter bobbing on its shoulder; the other seemed to be carrying a sleeping human child, who had its little fist firmly wrapped around the Cylon's big, armour-plated thumb. He saw two large green frogular types leaping down one corridor, the smaller one seemingly feminine. Down that way, he heard the sounds of a well-inhabited swimming pool. He followed, and found it stocked with people, frogs, little cookley

types, amphibious Cylons, a couple of apparent trees -- one of which seemed to be waving a camera -- and less identifiable beings. Briefly, he found himself in the centre of an orbiting cloud of little blue glowing lights that pulled his hair, then streaked off in some complex geometric game.

Eventually, he found himself back in the landing bay. Cy was standing by the ship, oddly tilted against it. At least, Starbuck thought it was their ship, and Cy. Extra fuel tanks now jutted out at odd angles from the Raider, and the Cylon seemed to have a small green-glowing insignia on one bicep.

"Er...Cy?" he inquired hesitantly.

"Starbuck. I-am-relieved-that-you-have-returned. The-ship-is-ready. They-have-been-modifying-it. Are-you-ready-to-leave-or-would-you-prefer-to-stay?"

"Cy, I don't know. Things feel so...strange...here. I just feel like I don't fit. I...Cy? What is that thing on your arm?"

"Thing-Starbuck? What-thing?"

Starbuck gestured, and Cy swivelled his ocular to stare at the mark.

"That thing. You okay, old pal?"

"It-is-strange-Starbuck. I-remember-an-oddly-painted-Cylon-named-Hildegarde-Six-offering-me-some-strangely-smelling-lubricant. She-called-me-'Sailer.' I-felt-unusual. Then-I-woke-up-here. It-is-quite-pleasing-however. It-reminds-me-of-the-reproductive-matrices-we-use-when-we-need-new-Cylons."

Cy flexed his arm, and the little swirl shimmered alluringly. Alluringly, of course, to a Cylon.

Starbuck and Cy regarded each other for a few millicentons. They looked around the landing bay teeming with things. They entered the Cylon fighter.

Inside, once past the huge stack of crated supplies, they reached the control seats, and Starbuck was very relieved to find a new chair. The old one was fine for Cylons, but not for humans. He sat down. It adjusted to his posterior. He leaned back, and it leaned with him. He found himself staring at the ceiling. He tried to get up, and hit a control in the side of the chair.

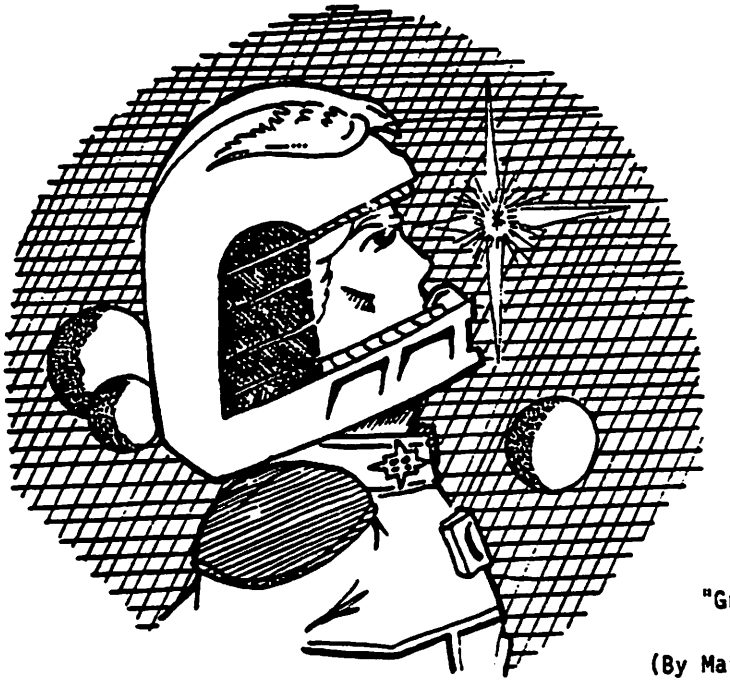
Something went "whoosh," and he was firmly held by crash webbing. He struggled a bit, called out for help, and was finally released by Cy.

"Are-you-playing-Starbuck?" asked the metal being, with a seeming air of innocence.

"No!" returned Starbuck, struggling into the perpendicular seated position. "Let's get out of here. Control, we're leaving the bay. Thank you, gentlemen, and goodbye."

They launched themselves out of the grinning mouth of the bay and circled the iron colossus of the ship, noticing its emblem -- "DEMENTIA" -- in cerise letters on the hull. Each pilot punched his respective boost buttons, and the refurbished vehicle sped rapidly into interstellar space.

"Dammit, sonny, I tol' ya to keep to yerself!" The quavering nasal voice came over the intra-ship communicator. A bolt of irate red fire blipped in their direction as the crotchety oldster took an admonitory pot-shot at them. They just pushed their buttons a bit harder.



"Grumblings"

(By Mary Robertson)

"Friend"

(By Karen Klinck)

Brother-of-the-soul. In your Viper,
Open your heart to your fellows.
Once you followed by duty
Men you now follow by trust.
Even the unknown holds no terrors,
Ruled by the fellowship of the Warriors.

"The Unknown Knight"

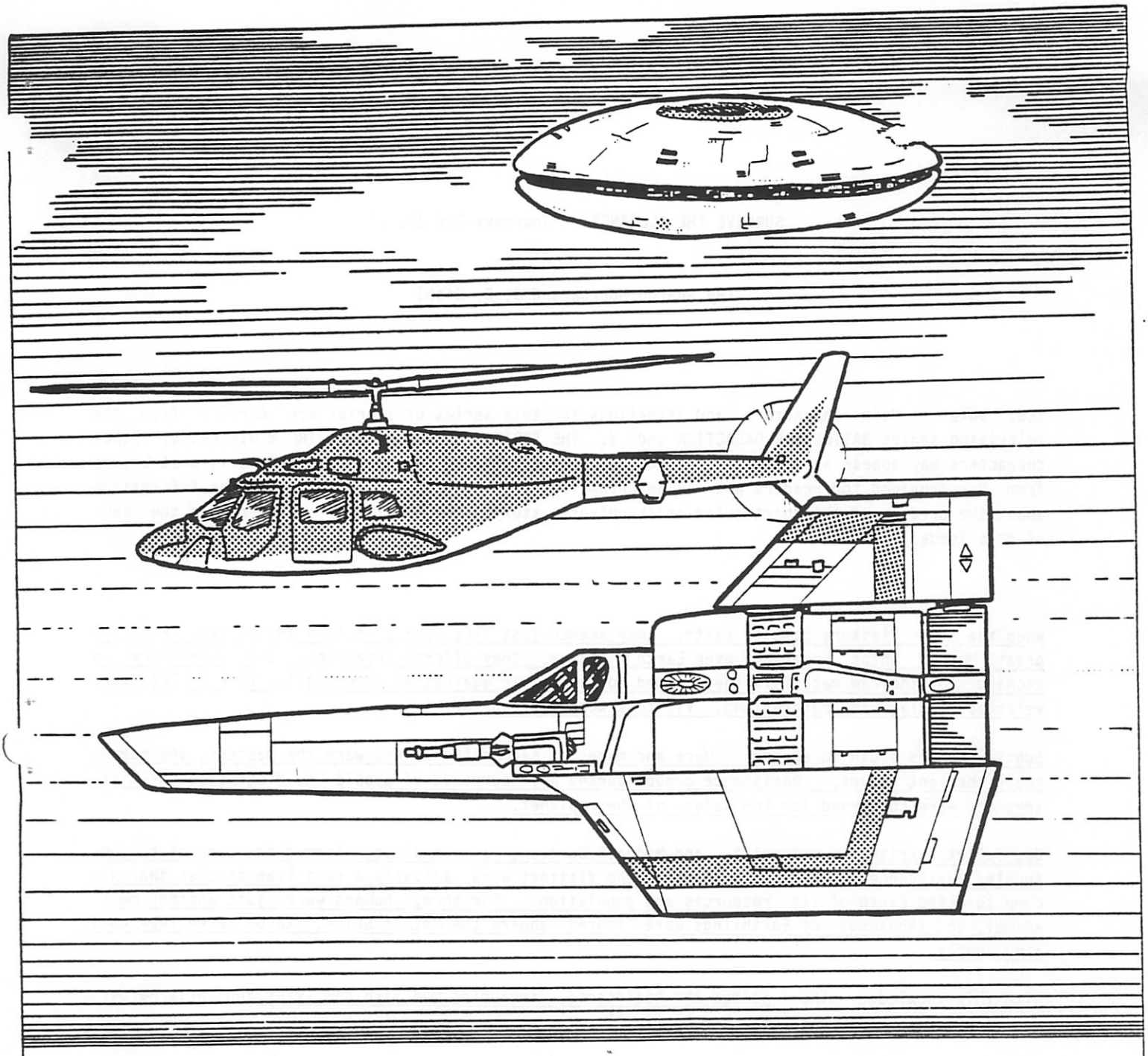
(By Karen Klinck)

Self-confident, resilient, and often lonely,
Though you surround yourself with crowds,
And go out of your way to be outrageous.
Remember the sight of Caprica under siege,
Burned into your brain by helpless distance?
Ultimately, you will know peace,
Containing all you want.
You are keeper of the Fleet's safety.

It's better than the Home, I said --
At least I'll get a decent bed.
The uniforms are kinda nice.
I think the wages will suffice.
And with the plaudits I'll collect,
My station will command respect.
I'll get to see the universe.
('Sides, how could life get any worse?)

I should have known -- but I was young,
And Standard not my native tongue.
And so I signed -- a foolish whim.
From then on, life got rather grim.
With Cylons, and galactic wars,
And interstellar mop-up chores.
(And for a little added bliss,
There's Cassie, and the Captain's sis.)

My quarters are both cramped and small.
And privacy? There's none at all!
The uniforms are hot, and tight.
I pull the watch most every night.
The work is hard; the pay is low.
And when I'm off, where can I go?
(I wish I'd known before I signed --
This isn't what I had in mind.)



SURVIVE THE ALLIANCE

by SHARON MONROE

SURVIVE THE ALLIANCE: "Journeys End In..."

(By Sharon Monroe and J. D. Rich)

(Ed. Note -- Main characters and situations for this series of stories are derived from the television series BATTLESTAR GALACTICA and V: THE SERIES, THE MOVIE and THE MINI-SERIES. Other characters may appear as needed. The following plot summary, necessarily brief as it must be, is from V, provided for readers who may be unfamiliar with that universe. For further information about the origins of this particular cross-universe story, check editors' statements in the back of this issue.)

When the alien Visitors came to Earth, they seemed just like humans in form and motive. From the great Mother Ships hovering over Earth's cities, they offered friendship and technology in exchange for the raw materials they needed for their war against an interstellar enemy. They were welcomed gladly, and before long, Visitors were everywhere.

Subtle changes began to appear. More and more, it seemed the aliens were the masters, and humans their obedient slaves. Resistance groups sprang up, composed of people who distrusted the Visitors and were concerned for the safety of their planet.

Dr. Juliet Parrish, a scientist, and Michael Donovan, a journalist, formed the core of the Los Angeles Resistance. They soon discovered the Visitors were actually a reptilian species that had come to bleed Earth of its resources and population. For them, humans were just another meat animal, and thousands of Earthlings were "stored" aboard the Mother Ships, to be taken away as a food supply.

With this knowledge, others joined the Resistance, including men like Ham Tyler and Chris Farber, mercenaries by trade, eager for another battle.

For one human, the Resistance had special importance. A teenager, pregnant by one of the aliens, delivered twins -- a human-looking girl named Elizabeth and a reptilian boy, who soon died. The surviving hybrid grew quickly, shedding her skin like a lizard until she had the appearance of an eight-year-old girl. In a second metamorphosis, she attained the physical maturity of an eighteen-year-old -- at an actual age of less than two years! She soon demonstrated awesome powers, including telekinesis and clairvoyance.

Diana, a Visitor scientist [Ed. note -- not to be confused with Captain Diana of the battlestar OSIRIS], took control of the invading fleet after assassinating her superiors. Uneasiness among the Visitors increased, and a fifth column movement sprang up, working with the Resistance. Willie, a simple trooper captured by the humans, joined them when he could no longer view Earthmen "like rats." Martin, an officer, befriended Mike Donovan and tried to save his son Sean, but the boy was irrevocably committed to the Visitor Youth Corps, and chose his alien mentor over his own father.

A bacterium toxic to the aliens was discovered, and the surviving Visitors were forced to flee the planet. Diana attempted to destroy Earth completely by exploding her Mother Ship, but Elizabeth Maxwell, the Starchild, prevented it, and the vicious Diana was captured. The fifth columnists were accepted in human society; they would have to take an antidote to the "Red Dust" every twelve hours for the rest of their lives, but they could survive on Earth. Global celebration broke out.

It was soon discovered that the Red Dust required a cold, dormant period in order to reproduce. The bacteria remained active in Earth's colder regions, but it soon died in areas that never froze, leaving large parts of the planet open to a second invasion. Diana escaped, killed Martin, and returned to the waiting Visitor fleet to lead that invasion.

Her new Security Commander was a female named Lydia. The power struggles and jealousy of the two women resulted in the arrival of Charles, a nobleman of their home planet, who immediately took command, forcing Diana to marry him. When he was poisoned on their wedding day, his new wife accused Lydia of being his lover and of murdering him.

Inspector General Philip arrived to judge the case. Invoking an ancient law, he forced Lydia and Diana to work together to preserve themselves. When he discovered it was actually Diana who had murdered his twin brother Martin, Philip actively joined the fifth column.

The L. A. Resistance hadn't been idle. Donovan and Parrish sent a message into space, to the enemies of the Visitors, asking their help. Nathan Bates, owner of Science Frontiers, bartered with Diana to keep his city free of actual combat. The humans continued to work on a new Red Dust, and several times daringly sabotaged Visitor strategies and experiments. The Starchild, with her uncanny abilities, remained their most potent weapon; her mother fled to Chicago when the Visitors tried to recapture her, but Elizabeth remained with the Resistance.

Kyle Bates, Nathan's rebellious son, found himself in league with the Resistance. He and Elizabeth soon fell in love. Visitor soldiers, under the command of James, Diana's personal favourite and paramour, invaded the city; small groups of aliens, collaborators, and Resistance fighters skirmished almost constantly, and civilians fled whenever they had the opportunity.

And that's the state of the war tonight...

* * * * *

Julie Parrish and Mike Donovan studied the stars, each wondering when, if ever, the enemies of the Visitors would pick up their signal, and if they would respond to the human distress call. The guerilla war had already cost so many lives in the attempt to save their planet from the invaders; if there was no help from the stars, they might keep fighting for years, until there was nothing left on Earth worth possessing. The lizards might suck their planet dry as a stolen egg.

"They'll come," the blonde woman said, cradling her laser rifle, a weapon stolen from their vicious foe. "They have to come. If they hate the Visitors as much as it seems, to be fighting a war of extermination, they've got to come."

"They will. But until they do, we've got to keep fighting. It's our Earth! And we'll find a way to hold it," Donovan assured her. He put an arm around her waist; in the cool mountain air, she was shivering.

"How long do you think it'll be, Mike?" she persisted.

"I don't know. Could be years. Could be tomorrow. But we'll hang in there. We've got to."

"I wonder what they're like, the enemies of the Visitors..." Julie's eyes wandered across the lights in the sky. From one of them might come Earth's salvation, an ally in their desperate struggle. But when?

She clutched his hand. They made an heroic picture, the guerrilla warriors who fought incredible odds with inferior technology. The alien weapons they carried were at odds with the dark jeans and turtleneck sweaters of native manufacture. Silhouetted against the star-speckled ebony of the night, their faces turned upward as they clung together, they were nonetheless figures of hope, perhaps the only hope left for their shattered world.

* * * * *

"Command-Centurion. We-are-receiving-a-signal. Its-origin-is-a-planet-in-Beta-sector. It-is-from-the-human-vermin."

The gold-overlaid Cylon swivelled to face its underling. Eerie light flashed off its shell from the bridge illuminators. "What-information-is-available?" it intoned without emotion.

"The-planet-is-Earth. The-GALACTICA-seeks-that-world. It-is-under-attack. The-attackers-appear-to-be-the-Forebears."

"Inform-Commander-Baltar. Send-a-signal-to-Cylon."

"By-your-command."

* * * * *

"Commander!" The excited brunette looked up; there was a light in her wide blue-green eyes. "Father!"

The blue-clad command officers were surprised at her loss of decorum.

"What is it, Lieutenant?" Colonel Tigh snapped.

"Athena?" Her father sounded more puzzled.

"A signal, on a low band! Sir, it's from Earth!" Her voice was a shrill squeak of elation.

"What?" Pandemonium broke out on the huge bridge of the battlestar, as personnel rushed over and excited voices carried her words along.

Then dismay and shock coloured her features. "Sir! They're under attack...by a lizard species..."

Adama spoke in the despairing silence that followed. "What information do they give?"

She stared vacantly at her board. "What...? Oh... They're under attack; it sounds like they're trying to summon an enemy of their invaders, someone who might be a friend..." She sighed shakily. "They give their coordinates..."

The Commander s face had been closed and carefully blank; it suddenly opened in horror. "They give their coordinates on an open channel? Lords of Kobol..."

"What is it, sir?" Tigh questioned urgently.

"The Cylons! They must be receiving this as well! They know, now, where we're going, and how to get there! Omega, plot a course for that location! Get us there as rapidly as possible!"

The Flight Officer ran back to his post.

"Tigh!" Adama whispered. "Could we have come so far, just to know the Cylons may already be on the way?"

"At least we can warn them..."

"How long will the trip take?" the old veteran snapped at his young officer.

"Approximately eight sectars, sir," Omega replied intently.

He nodded and turned away. "A long time," he breathed. "Perhaps all the time Earth has. The Lords grant we have a chance to help them." To himself, he wondered. <u>They already face an enemy from the stars, and seek allies against the invaders. We looked to them for hope in our own struggle. Do we unite merely to witness the end of our race?</u>

The situation had never before looked so bleak to the Commander of the GALACTICA.

* * * * *

<u>The forces drew together, with Earth as their focus. At Philip's urging, the Leader came, seeking to make a peaceful alliance between their disparate species, reptilian and human. He took Elizabeth Maxwell, the Starchild, to be his consort, after the fashion of his people, to give her that part of her heritage. Unknown to them all, the treacherous Diana, fanatically aspiring to military glory and political power, had planted a bomb aboard the Leader's shuttle...</u>

* * * * *

"Kyle stowed away!"

The Resistance leaders and their Visitor friends stared after the departing shuttle, realizing that Kyle Bates would not, after all, permit the half-human woman he loved to leave him. After all they'd seen and experienced of the Leader in the past few weeks, after the vision of his brightly shining form, the young man still meant to win Elizabeth back, convince her to remain on Earth.

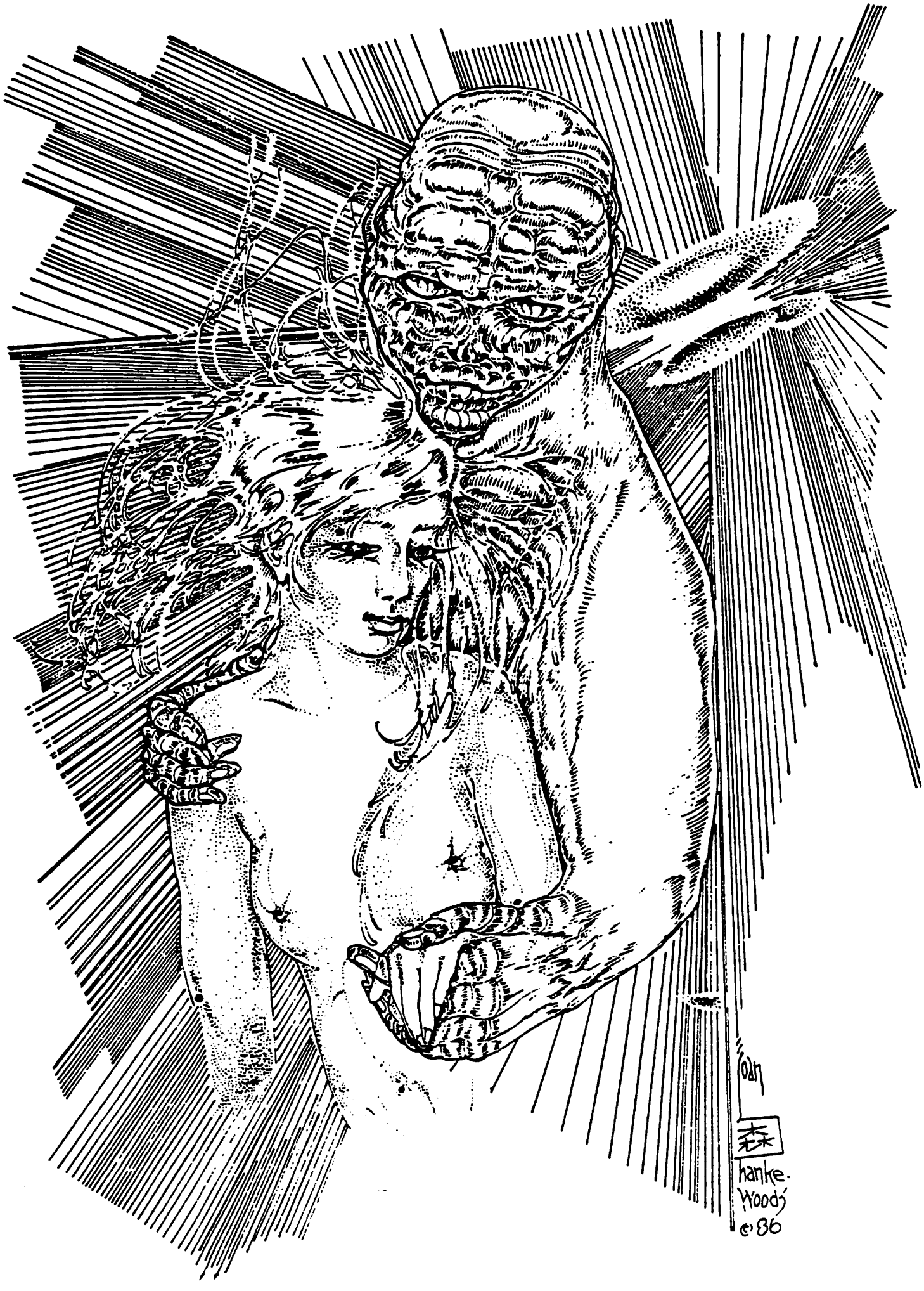
"I do not believe the Leader will harm him..." Philip ventured. "Elizabeth would not permit it."

"If she still remembers her humanity, after that...what did you call it, psychic commune? She went to that shuttle with the look of a woman going to her lover!" Donovan commented.

"As I am sure she is," the Visitor officer agreed. "But if I am not mistaken, she has loved Kyle as well, and the Leader will sense that, and accept it."

"I don't know too many men who would trust an old flame around!" Julie murmured, watching Mike Donovan obliquely.

"The Leader is not a man; he is more than simply a male of our species. More than that, I cannot explain; it is part of our racial memory, our existence as a species. I doubt you would understand it totally," Philip stated with quiet conviction.


hanke-
Woods
©'86

"Try us!" Donovan demanded.

"Mike!" Julie interrupted. "The middle of a Visitor Mother Ship is no place to be questioning motives and actions." Her smile eased the words. "You've trusted Philip before; trust him now. This is supposed to be a seal of peace between us. He says the Leader will understand. Maybe Kyle will come to see and accept Elizabeth's decision, and come back to us..."

"What if he doesn't?" There was no answer to the troubling question as the humans turned to Philip and his aide, Commander Lydia. It was the female alien who spoke.

"The Leader came here for Elizabeth. He knew her soul before he arrived; she is truly one of us as well as one of you. The Leader thus knows that Kyle loves her, and must be willing to accept that as part of her. But it is her past now; Kyle is no threat to what the Starchild and the Leader will share. It is simply another proof that we have many things in common, that both our species are capable of love -- and compassion." Her lips curved coldly, and something fiercely elated touched her eyes. "If you will excuse me, I must see to the prisoners."

The female in the form of a slender blonde human moved away. Diana and James had been thorns under her belly for a long time, but it had taken this long to prove their treason against the planet and the Leader to whom she had devoted her life.

"If you wish to return to the surface," Philip began, "there is a shuttle ready, with one of our former fifth columnists to pilot you."

"Yes, thank you, Philip. We have a lot of rebuilding to do..." Julie said. "Let's go, Mike."

As they walked, the man commented in an undertone, "I trust Philip as I trusted Martin, but the Leader certainly didn't seem very compassionate when they first landed and invaded, destroying or brainwashing half our population while using the other half for food!"

"I'm worried about Kyle, too. But there doesn't really seem to be anything we can do about it now. Wait and see what happens..."

* * * * *

Diana's glare was like that of a captured cobra, while Lydia's smile suggested a python gloating over its breathless prey before swallowing it whole.

"Well, Diana, darling," the jailer announced, "it seems you have finally lost!"

"It's not over yet, Lydia, dear. You shall see, you and Philip both."

Her captor's eyes flicked casually over the grey prison tunic and confinement belt the other woman wore. "I already see, Diana, darling. Let me know if you'd like a scorpion. I'd be happy to oblige you, one final favour for old time's sake." With a bit of a smirk, she turned and walked out.

Diana hissed. For a moment, her reptilian tongue flicked from her human-shaped mouth. The false eyes couldn't hide the angry, hate-filled gleam of the slitted irises below. "When the Leader dies, soon, soon," she whispered, "I'll tear out your living heart and feast on it, Lydia. And Philip's, too! I will drain this planet, and leave it an empty, sloughed skin!"

A moment later, another Visitor in human-skin entered.

"Well, what do you want?" Diana demanded of the unfamiliar figure.

"Commander," the man said deferentially, "I am Lieutenant Douglas. I've served on this ship for almost a year, though I'm sure you don't remember me. My work has never been of the type to come to your notice..."

"So?" she hissed. "Why are you here?"

He looked around before coming conspiratorially closer. "There are those of us who do not wish peace with the humans. Some of us feel we have spent too much to give up this world now. We have lost siblings and friends to these humans. We wish to see them properly humbled, and you, Commander, in your proper place as conqueror of this world..."

She stepped closer, a smile growing on her face. "And you came here simply to tell me that?" she asked softly. "I'm grateful for your loyalty, but..."

Before she could tell him to do something concrete, the young officer spoke again, urgently. "Commander, we have a shuttle ready. If you wish to escape, we have a place prepared on this planet, a hideout. The fifth columnists are not the only ones to keep secrets. When we saw what might happen, heard that the Leader approached... We can leave, now, while things are still uncertain, before the Mother Ships fall back from this world as a gesture of good faith..."

"I remember you. You're in Communications."

"Yes."

"Lead me, Douglas. And I assure you, your loyalty will receive the reward it deserves," she assured him fervently. Her smile was a promise as well. The young Visitor was tall and strong, handsome even in his human disguise. She'd noticed him before, but the blond James had come to her attention before she could act on her inclinations. James, however, was becoming tiresome, his ambitions too great. Perhaps her paramour needed some gentle encouragement to try harder to please her...

* * * * *

"So, with Kyle gone, you get to set up Science Frontiers again." Donovan shook his head. "Quite a job."

"Well," Julie smiled, "I won't exactly be doing it alone. Steve Mayland is coming down to help..."

Donovan couldn't help stiffening. He'd forgotten the old flame, the scientist they'd helped rescue from the Mother Ship, after sabotaging another of Diana's vile experiments.

The woman looked apologetic. "We need him, Mike. This is where a lot of the technological exchange will be going on. He knows their equipment, and the theories their science works on. He's probably the most experienced man we've got left after the Visitor purges..."

"And you still love him, and promised him you'd be together again when the war was over."

She looked away. "I think so, Mike. I hope we can still be friends."

He seemed sorry, but nodded. "I hope so too, Julie. Gotta get back to Tyler and Chris pretty soon. We got a lot of cleaning up to do in L.A., and some friendly Visitors to get settled in.

That alien embassy's finally going to be what it was intended to be!"

She laughed. "Oh, that's good to hear, Mike. Give 'em all my best wishes, will you?"

Willie suddenly scurried in the door. "Julie! It is Philip on the communication scream! He says it is very impertinent!"

The humans tried valiantly to conceal their laughter. After so long, the friendly alien still had difficulty with their language.

"That's screen, Wille. And I'm sure it's important!" Julie leaned over her desk and raised the telescreen -- another gift of Visitor technology. "I'm here, Philip. What is it?"

"Julie! Is Donovan still there?" He sounded worried.

"I'm here, Philip. What's going on?" He moved into view behind the petite blonde.

"It's Diana! She's escaped!"

"What? How? I thought she was under guard!"

"She was; Lydia saw to that. We found her two guards dead, and her gone. Her lieutenant as well, and a handful of other prisoners." His voice turned grimmer. "There are other personnel missing, both from this ship and the other six. We're afraid they may be on your planet, hiding somewhere, preparing for an attack of some kind."

"Why?" Julie interrupted. "Your Leader said there was a truce!"

Philip took a deep breath. "Not all of us want peace, you know that. Those missing may be part of that group, who would still rather humble and destroy your people than welcome you as friends and allies."

"What do you want us to do?"

"We're going to try and locate the missing Visitors. Don't alarm your population -- they're already skittish enough of us -- but get some people out looking for them. That...Ham Tyler, is it?... would probably be a good man for the job..."

"He'd be a very good man for the job. I'll get right on it. See you later, Julie, Philip. Keep me informed of anything..." Suddenly the guerrilla fighter with back to the wall again, Donovan hurried out the door.

Philip signed off a moment later, leaving Julie staring at the empty screen for several moments. "Diana's loose -- on the surface." She planted her left hand on the desk in front of her, and studied it for a long time. She shuddered as she tested its ability to pick up a pen and write her name: the influence of Diana's mind control machine wasn't completely gone, even after so long. She threw the pen away violently and clenched a fist. "I won't let you get to me, Diana. I won't!"

* * * * *

It had been a long eight sectars for the Colonial Fleet of refugees. Finally, they reached their objective -- System Sol, and its third planet, the world the human inhabitants called Terra, Earth. Leaving the civilian ships orbiting within the presumed safety of an asteroid belt in one

of the nearer systems, the battlestar GALACTICA moved to an orbit around the farthest planet of the system to plot its next move.

In the briefing chamber, Commander Adama convened a meeting of his flight leaders and senior officers.

"This system hardly has the look of a war zone," one of the Warriors commented, studying the scan reports. They hadn't yet risked patrols through the quadrant, other than necessary trips in the vicinity of their base.

"Could they have already lost, and be occupied?" Captain Apollo asked solemnly.

"There'd be enemy ships around then, military guards and supply vessels," Tigh stated, frowning. "And from the message we received, Earth wasn't up to the technology of the invaders. What could account for this...lack of activity?"

"They lost, and nothing's left," muttered Boomer.

"Perhaps a lull in the fighting? They may have a truce, or made peace..." the Captain suggested.

"The transmissions we're currently receiving, along with more recent long-range scans, seem to indicate a truce," Adama stated. "But we don't know the situation on Earth after their conflict. I had hoped we would be able to determine the people's condition without giving away our existence and our own tenuous position. But it seems we must make contact on our own initiative, and perhaps ally weakness to weakness, in hopes of finding new strength."

He directed his attention to Apollo. "Captain, prepare a patrol roster. Use your best pilots. You know the orders concerning first contact with a new and potentially dangerous species. Obey them. I have no qualms about trusting your discretion, but considering the circumstances, our own security must be maintained. Report to me for a final briefing when you ve selected your personnel."

"Yes, sir."

* * * * *

"So that's Earth. Looks nice from out here."

"Yeah. Wonder how it is down there," Apollo responded to Starbuck's comment.

The patrols had gathered beyond the third planet's single moon, preparatory to making their sweeps. A dozen Colonial Vipers, containing the finest Warriors from Red and Blue Squadrons of the GALACTICA, had flown into the system, maintaining radio silence the entire way. They shared final comments and awaited final instructions before their possibly hazardous survey of Sol Three -- Terra.

They had no idea what might be waiting for them on the lovely blue-and-white planet. The enemy might have obliterated the human inhabitants, and either abandoned the world or occupied it themselves; or the natives might be reduced to a primitive struggle for survival, with no interest in their star-faring brothers, and no ability to help them. The people and the world itself might be poisonous, or antagonistic to them, after six millennia of genetic drift, altered life-styles, and warfare.

They accepted the risk. After so long, they had to hope. It was all they had left.

"Lot of garbage up here," Boomer commented.

"Yeah. Doesn't look like combat debris, though." Apollo did his best to be optimistic, although the trash orbiting the world and its moon disturbed him as much as it did his friend. Communications satellites, spent fuel pods and thrusters, some industrial cast-offs... Hardly the stuff of a determined space colonization effort -- more like the results of a curiosity since turned elsewhere. Maybe the Earthlings didn't care what happened in space? Or maybe the alien attack nad prematurely aborted their attempts to leave the surface of their planet?

There was one way to find out.

"Okay, everyone. You remember the briefing. Quick fly-overs. Landing only in isolated areas if it seems safe. Watch your scanners for other craft or anti-aircraft artillery. And whatever happens, we conduct ourselves as Warriors. We can't lead potential enemies back to the GALACTICA. If you're captured, do your best to keep silent under interrogation -- in whatever form it assumes. Let's go."

* * * * *

"Philip!" the blonde female called from across the bridge of the alien Mother Ship.

"What is it, Lydia? Word on Diana from the operatives we left on Earth?"

"No, sir. Word from our more distant skyfighter patrols. Debris from another wrecked freighter was picked up on scanners."

Her superior frowned. "That makes five in the past two weeks, Earth time."

"Yes, sir. But this time, we know how it happened. Our patrol checked it out, and were attacked themselves. There are a large number of fighter ships, big ones, between us and Homeworld. We've been cut off from supply lines and avenues of retreat."

He instantly moved nearer, wondering how a face mask could manage to convey the urgent sense of panic on his cool and not-entirely-trusted officer. Their alliance against Diana was a fragile thing, and Lydia's devotion to him might end at any time. "Well?"

"Philip, they're Cylon!" she hissed.

He instinctively curled his shoulders into a protective position and hissed angrily. "Cylons! Here? How? So near Earth? Are you certain?"

"Yes! There's no possibility of mistaken identification. A group of them was taken from a fighter before our people had to retreat. The Cylons have found us again!"

The ancient enemy! Their own creation, that had once turned on its masters and nearly destroyed them, warrior race though they were... Did they now besiege Homeworld and the other colonies of their species?

Philip turned away. We thought we'd escaped them, all those millennia ago, when our subspecies claimed Homeworld and made it ours. The Cylons were so far away, fighting another war. We thought we were free to grow strong, to return when we were ready to try again to destroy what we had unleashed. But now, they come for us instead!

"We must warn Earth. Bring me a report of everything our sentries learned."

"Sir!" She added another ominous note. "That route -- it's the one the Leader took!"

"Raman! And we have no way of knowing whether he got through before they came!" He invoked the most revered warrior hero of their history as the searing possibility of civil war burned behind his eyes like the midday sun of Homeworld. The Leader had only just taken a consort -- there was no offspring, no named heir to take his place! Charles had been of the House of Raman, the most likely one to succeed in this case, but he was dead as well, leaving only a widow...Diana. No offspring known, but there was still time, if she and Charles...

"No!"

He hadn't realized he'd been thinking aloud until Lydia interrupted him, appalled. "Diana can't possibly become the Leader! She'd never survive the investiture! You're of one of the Houses, not as royal as Raman, but..."

Lydia touched his arm desperately, a human gesture. If Diana became the Leader, she herself would face a messy execution for her past opposition -- and her entire family would likely be exiled or assassinated as well.

"My family is irrelevant, Lydia. As is Diana. We are both cut off from any decision as to the succession. We must act to safeguard ourselves -- and the innocent humans on Earth..."

"Why concern ourselves with them?" she cried, astonished. "With the Leader dead, our first responsibility with Cylons once more against us is surely to reach Homeworld."

The Leader wished a truce between us."

"But he may well be dead!"

"These humans are fierce fighters. I am sure I need not remind you of that after the time you have spent here. Imagine them as allies against the Cylons. With our technology, and their spirit, they might well make the difference! Especially if our people face a civil war as well as interstellar conflict..." The beginnings of a plan filtered into his mind, and he knew it was a necessary step.

"What?"

"Lydia, prepare a skyfighter. We must go back to the planet, speak to Julie Parrish and the other scientists and world leaders."

"Yes, sir. Shall we bring our Mother Ships back into orbit around Earth?"

He considered. "Not yet. If the Cylons aren't aware of Earth's existence, they could become our...trump card, I believe the humans would say." His aide nodded and went to carry out his orders.

He considered his position. Seven Mother Ships. Perhaps not all of them loyal to the Leader's plans if he were dead. A good-sized fighting force, against a primitive planet like the one they'd withdrawn from, but was it enough to take on a Cylon fleet if they attacked in strength? It was possible he couldn't defend Earth anyway, even if the other six ship commanders supported him whole-heartedly.

Cylons. An ancient nightmare. The enemy they'd fought for so long all those millennia ago -- a soulless metal race they skirmished with even now, although never on this side of Homeworld, only

on distant colonies in other quadrants. The foe they'd planned to fight only when they had the strength of their distant ancestors, who'd designed the monsters, thinking they could use them to conquer the galaxy...

"We were fools, then," he whispered. "But what brought them here, to this place, in this time? They have come to destroy us again..."

* * * * *

"Ready for a test flight, Dom?" The rugged blond man looked less than debonair wherever he was, but especially so with his face and coveralls spotted liberally with machine oil and grease.

"Ah, the Lady's ready for anything we throw at her! The blueprints Archangel sent us from Science Frontiers were a real treasure, String, you know that? That little bit of Visitor technology on our Airwolf's gonna make a real difference if it comes to a fight."

"Well, it probably will, if that information about renegade Visitors is right." Hawke was a veteran of numerous battles and skirmishes, both in the air and on the ground, in both the war against the aliens and an earlier war against his fellow humans on another continent. He was not blase about battle, but had long ago learned to shield his emotions from everyone, even his best friend.

Dominic Santini knew that, and he grinned, undismayed by Hawke's taciturn growl. "Forget it, String. Let's go take her up for a spin, okay?"

Hawke smiled faintly, and shrugged. "Sure, Dom. What else did we come out here for today?"

"Okay! I ll call Caitlin and tell her we'll be a little later than I expected..."

* * * * *

Apollo and Starbuck swept over the dry southwestern portion of the smaller northern continent. There were large population centres along the coastal areas, and they wanted to stay some distance away from both those and the military installations they detected farther north and east.

The Captain studied his scanners carefully, while the Lieutenant was more fascinated by their surroundings and what was in front of him.

Suddenly, he saw something. "What...? Starbuck, check your rear scanners!"

"I don't see anything."

"Yeah. But something's coming up on us awfully fast... What in Hades is it?"

The <u>something</u> flashed by their Vipers in a black-and-white blur. Their monitors picked up an odd whine, but otherwise, the object didn't show on their scanners.

Starbuck was clearly intrigued; since the thing hadn't fired on them, it seemed safe to speculate. "Looked like one of their marine animals, Apollo, but I didn't think their...killer whales?...could fly!"

"No," the other pilot replied slowly, frowning. "They've got what they call flying fish, but they really just glide over the water, and nothing <u>marine</u> should be out here in this desert!"


HAWKE

"Then what...?"

The unknown flashed by them again, seemingly as puzzled as they were, then banked away once more.

In the ship reminiscent of a flying killer whale, two humans spoke to each other when their communications attempt failed.

"Doesn't look Visitor -- what've you got back there?"

Dom sounded puzzled. "I dunno... It doesn't respond to our recognition signal. They obviously didn't pick us up on radar -- they didn't react until we were within visual range."

"It's not ours," Hawke stated flatly, as if daring Dominic to contradict him.

"Probably not," Dom agreed grimly. "Michael would've warned us if we had anything like that! And anything that isn't a friendly..."

"...doesn't belong in our skies," Hawke finished. "Combat mode, Dom."

The older man chuckled, and started hitting switches and buttons. "You got it, String. Quite a test flight, eh?"

Hawke did not dignify that with an answer. "Turbos."

"Turbos."

Apollo was astonished a moment later to find himself fired upon by a very lethal-looking burst of laser fire -- another gift of alien machinery.

"Starbuck, get out of here!" he yelped. "They're armed and dangerous!"

"Apollo!"

"I'm hit..." The Viper suddenly spun away from him.

Before Starbuck could follow, the alien craft was on his tail, and he had to take evasive action the only way he knew how -- up. The aircraft followed for a time, then faltered at a certain altitude and banked away. The Lieutenant saw his chance, and grimly dove back toward the surface, searching for his friend.

As he skimmed over the surface, looking for evidence of a Viper and calling on all channels, he suddenly saw a burst of flame flare from the floor of a canyon below. In shock, he realized what it must be.

"Apollo!"

* * * * *

Their shuttle had strayed from its path long before, never entering the dark zone that was the first part of the star-route to Homeworld. The enemy presence had been noted by the Visitor pilots, but the Leader and his dreamy-eyed consort paid no attention as the days passed; they were totally absorbed in each other. The single human, the stowaway Kyle Bates, paced between the Leader's partitioned-off section and the pilots' cubicle. None of them had much time for him.

Weary after two weeks in the cramped quarters, he threw himself one day into a seat opposite the smiling, distant Elizabeth Maxwell, the fair Starchild who'd given herself to the Leader to make peace, and who seemed more distant and alien to him with every passing hour.

"Damn it, Elizabeth, at least talk to me!" he cried unhappily. "You haven't had two words for me the whole trip."

The eyes that focussed on him weren't hers; they were the Leader's again. "Kyle," the Starchild said sympathetically in a very masculine voice, "I understand your emotions, but please permit us ours at this time. We have much yet to learn of each other..."

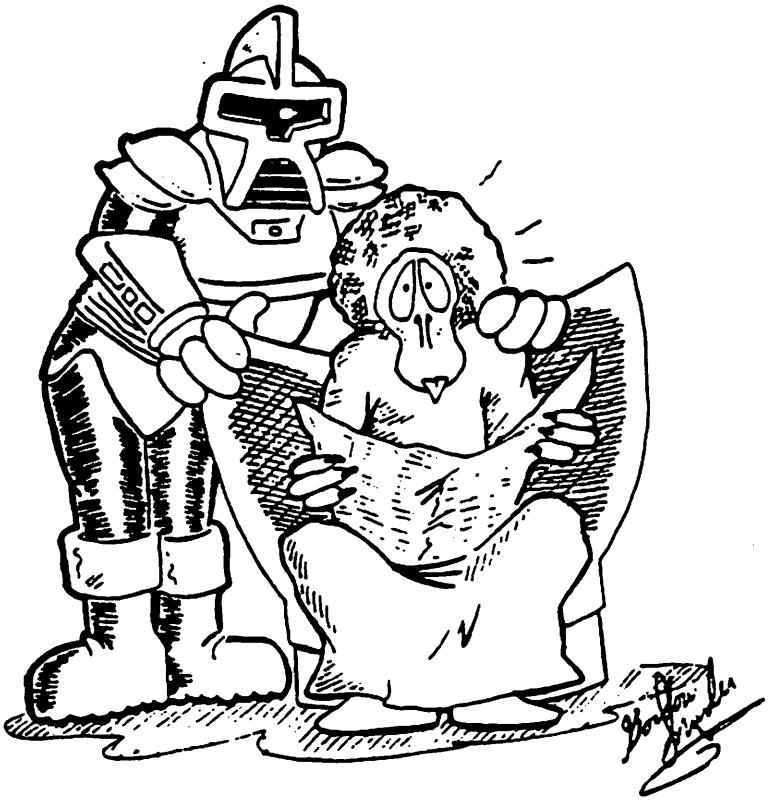
The voice faded, and the man slammed his fist against the wall in frustration. "I want to talk to Elizabeth!" he raged.

The woman suddenly stiffened. Unknown to the occupants, the shuttle had drifted near the danger zone set by the treacherous Diana when she prepared her explosives. A timer began to tick.

"A danger!" she called, although the voice was still the Leader's. "My people, Kyle... Elizabeth, we must..."

An explosion ripped through space, and a sudden fire-ball lit the void.

(Coming soon: "New Frontiers")



Hey, DAD. CAN I BORROW THE KEYS TO THE BASE-SHIP??

"WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE . . . ?"

H. Ravenwood



"Why Did It Have To Be...?"

(By H. Ravenwood)

When a landing party from the battlestar OSIRIS was sent to the surface of the planet Byzel for an in-depth exploration, the Colonials began from the very beginning to encounter disasters -- brief disappearances, accidental death, theft, attempted murder, growing paranoia... Captain Diana, the party's military commander, found herself beginning to doubt her own sanity. Others from the expedition became convinced the planet was haunted; fear and anxiety began to spread.

Snakes, basts, and insects were everywhere. When the red moons of Byzel -- the "World Where All Things Speak" -- moved into conjunction, the event was greeted by a wild and unnerving chorus from the survivors of the once-powerful beings who had inhabited the planet; two nights of primal madness followed. Diana searched for the missing Lieutenant Morgan. Sentiologist 1/c Tanis's exploration of a massive amphitheatre in the desert ended in an encounter with a huge and awesome serpent. Sentiologist Ashur reached the conclusion that humans had previously visited Byzel. Lieutenant Freya's beloved sentiological bast Elidor was killed in a cave-in. Captain Oisin arrived to take charge of security, and promptly alienated almost every Warrior in camp. Sentiologist Renet killed Cultural Survey Tech Shari, and considered further acts of violence against both Tanis and Ashur, whom he viewed as rivals. Four missing personnel wandered lost in a labyrinth beneath the city.

On Diana's orders, Captain Hannibal began a surreptitious investigation. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Quetzal discovered Shari's body buried in the sands beyond Renet's sanctum.

During all the turmoil in the Colonial camp, Morgan continued his efforts to communicate with and learn from the giant serpents in the desert. As the powerful alien beings grew more and more impatient with the activities of the humans, the man felt an uneasy certainty that they contemplated violence against his friends. Their anger could be felt -- Diana, Captain Talos, and others awoke shivering in the night, unable to explain their fear and nightmares.

With Oisin forbidding the civilians to leave the city, Tanis concentrated his attention on excavating the Dome of Srolt, where Elidor had died. Under the stress of the excavation, the dome collapsed, injuring a number of techs and dumping Tanis and several others into the hub of a series of radiating tunnels. Unexpectedly, a ground tremor shook the city, and the floor fell away beneath the Colonials, dropping them into the darkness, giving them no time to consider what might await them some unknown distance below...

Part XII

The screams ended in oofs of surprise as five Colonials slammed solidly into another rocky floor. After a suspenseful moment spent expecting to feel ceiling and walls collapse on top of him, Tanis decided he wasn't going to die that day, and called up to his comrades, "We're alive! Get some help, and get us out of here!"

Something gleamed in the dim light; he thought he could reach the dangling rope if he stood and stretched for it. Over in the shadows, he heard a woman coughing in the haze of eons-old dust. Lucas's voice breathed a fervent prayer.

"Freya? Alexandra?" he called. The Biosurvey tech was obviously all right, if he had wits enough to call upon a deity, and he wasn't really too concerned with Oisin's health.

"Here!" they replied. The Security Captain growled something as well, and Tanis knew his party was intact. A moment's groping, and he recovered his hat and arc lantern; the lantern was broken.

Another coil of rope dropped from above, almost hitting him on the head, but succeeding only in knocking the battered hat back to the floor. Tanis retrieved it again before grasping the rope and standing, very carefully, hoping no broken bones would topple him again. He tugged energetically -- an old habit to test its strength.

The treacherous site wasn't through with them. At that moment, something grated against stone, and the floor was no longer beneath him. The rope slipped through his fingers as he found himself falling again...

He couldn't breathe. The atmosphere was thick, cold, and inky black around him. He quickly figured out why when he gulped for air -- he was under water! He choked as he unexpectedly swallowed stale, slightly bitter liquid.

A micron later, he surfaced, coughing violently as he began treading water.

A cistern! Lords of Kobol, an underground cistern! He was disgusted for a moment at being dumped into a well on this dry planet, but it all made perfect sense. Water! Of course! The Guardian was pointing out the most important resource they'd have in a place like this! What good are gems or gold or even gods when you're dying of thirst?

He heard splashing around him. "Everybody here?" he called. He could barely make out figures; they were even deeper underground than before, and the morning sun's rays were at the wrong angle to penetrate so far. A dim light filtered through the dark waters -- from their lanterns, sunk somewhere below them. His hat floated into reach, and he quickly retrieved it.

Lucas bubbled something at him, and he recognized Freya's annoyed voice. Oisin's comments, between sputterings, were more caustic.

From the way the assorted voices echoed, the underground water system extended for quite some distance on all sides of them. Probably served the whole city, at one time. I wonder how long it's been since this was a working well... Tanis mentally doffed his soaking wet hat to the city's builders, then it occurred to him in his fascination that one of his team hadn't answered. "Alexandra?"

"Here," she called weakly.

"Where?" He looked in the direction of her voice. She was barely visible, perched precariously on what was now a narrow ledge, all that was left of the floor they'd fallen from.

"Are you all right?"

"I think so."

"Then come on in, the water's fine!"

"Yeah! A bath's just what you need, after the sectons we've been on this desert!" Lucas added snidely. His sense of humour was returning, and he couldn't resist the opportunity.

"I can't swim very well!" the Sergeant's voice floated shakily back to the paddling group. "And I don't want my death stone to read, 'She drowned in the only well on a desert planet'!"

"Then you'd better stay there," Tanis agreed. "The rescue team can get you out first. Uh, Captain Oisin, I presume you can swim?"

"Of course," was the ungracious reply. "How in Hades did you let this happen, Tanis? A sentiologist of your reputed stature couldn't figure out there was something down here?"

"I was going to ask the same thing of our esteemed Security officer!" he replied sarcastically. "You're supposed to be protecting us!" The hub-bub above them being indicative of a rescue soon forthcoming, the two men were not against tearing into each other.

"Something's alive in here!" Lucas suddenly interrupted.

"I should hope so! We're in here!" Freya snapped in return before the sentiologist or the security man could respond.

"No! Something else!"

The four were still, listening intently. Their treading motions slowed, and they sank deeper into the water, straining their eyes to see around them.

"What makes you think something's alive?" Tanis asked tensely.

"I heard a splash... There it is again! Something's moving! It just went past my leg!" The young man's voice had precipitously risen to a near-soprano level, and he began thrashing wildly.

"What..."

Lucas shrieked. There was a splashing sound, then silence from his direction.

"Kid? Lucas?"

There was no response. Tanis, Oisin, and Freya listened to the empty silence for a long moment.

"We've got to get out of here..." Oisin sounded shaken.

"Lucas?" Tanis called again, wondering briefly how deep the cistern was, how extensive it was, and

what manner of creatures might live in its waters. He could hear the Lieutenant splashing nearer to him.

The surface broke explosively as a young man shot through to gasp a wild breath. He subsided back into the water, choking and coughing.

Freya was close enough to grab his arm. "What happened?" she demanded. "What was it?"

"I don't know!" he sputtered. "It had me, then it just let me go! I don't know where it went..."

There was a yelp and another splash -- one of the rescue team had been lowered too quickly, and hit the water.

"We'll worry about what it was later," Tanis decided. "For now, let's get out of here." For once, Oisin was in complete agreement, and prudently kept silent.

* * * * *

Morgan sensed the intent to destroy the humans, and he sent an urgent appeal to those among the Elders who might listen to him. His relief when the water serpent released Lucas was profound and sincere. Thank you!

The serpent, huge as it was in its copper glory, seemed small and almost plain to him after the time he'd spent in the company of the magnificently hued, incomprehensively large Elders. It swayed before him in the dimness of the deep cavern. They accepted your plea, it told him. We give your people another chance. The ones in the well shall live. It slithered from his awareness, although he could still vaguely sense the existence of the Ancients somewhere nearby.

Morgan sighed. The Most Ancient One found him a creature of value -- but how much value did he have against their growing anger at the Colonials' behaviour? There was so much they could teach him, but he could tell they were becoming uneasy about his humanness. He couldn't blame them; the more they saw of the Colonials, the more they probed motives and reactions, the less pleased they were at the human presence. They were off-worlders, aliens who had come uninvited to desecrate the Byzellian society.

They see us as contaminating their world, and they don't like it. How in the Lords' names are we supposed to get out of here alive, after what Renet did? They saw, they know. They have the ability to kill, but not like that, for jealousy and greed. And all they see now is our avid interest in their ruins, the way we keep digging up their structures and trying to reconstruct statuary and murals, when they revere the past in a different way...

Renet doesn't realize the danger he's put us all in. And he probably wouldn't care. But he and his kind... Morgan had to consider carefully before assuring himself that Tanis wasn't to be included in "his kind."

* * * * *

Renet's expression was strangely blank, almost as if he were in shock, Wilson noted. "You okay?" he asked, trailing the man through the maze of fallen columns and low-roofed buildings.

The sentiologist stared past him, gaze fixed on one of the distant structures towering over the rest of the ruined city. "Ashur," he murmured.

"Don't know where he is..."

"I know. A serpent, huge. Took him away. Almost took me..."

"What?" the Warrior yelped. "What are you saying?"

Renet focussed on him for a brief micron. "I have duties to attend to. I must assemble a team, go to the Amphitheatre..."

"Isn't that Tanis's site? Besides, Security doesn't want anybody out of the city. What do you mean, a serpent took Ashur?"

"I have to go. I am called..."

Sergeant Wilson tagged along behind the sentiologist, arguing, but the man ignored him completely as he strode back to the camp.

* * * * *

"Light!"

Persephone and Thoth heard Volsung's cry, followed by Corvus's laughter. With a weary look at each other, they hurried forward, their arc lantern barely keeping a circle of light ahead of their steps.

Suddenly, the lantern was unnecessary. Around one of the massive coils in the labyrinth, they, too, could see light. And hear sounds -- the delicate splashing of disturbed waters, and the curses and questions of men and women calling to one another.

Their two companions stood poised against the light and sound, dark shadows silhouetted before them.

"Corvus! Volsung!" somebody yelled.

The younger tech fell forward, diving head-first out of sight.

The two Warriors reached the lip of fallen stone, staring at the rescue effort in progress -- men above, ropes dangling before them, and a few dark shapes bobbing in the reflective waters below. One of the shapes was Corvus, being kept from drowning in his unhealthy state by one of the sentiologists. Tanis held the young man's head above water while one of the Security men fastened a rope beneath his armpits. He offered neither resistance nor assistance to their attempt to save him.

Thoth sank to the stone floor, breathing heavily of the fresher air wafting down from the broken dome open to the sky. Persephone permitted herself to lean against the wall as she waited patiently for the rescuers to expand their reach to include them. Volsung would have dived down into the well, eager to satisfy his thirst after a day and a half, but she restrained him.

We're going to live!

* * * * *

Hannibal picked up the laser nestled in the floor cache among the rest of Renet's treasures. He'd suspected for a long time that something was disturbing the sentiologist, and this might be proof. Shari had been killed by a laser; Renet, one of the later arrivals and a civilian, wasn't supposed

to be armed: a weapon had been missing from the Security checkpoint for several days, although the information hadn't been relayed to Captain Diana, since Captain Oisin was now in charge of camp security. Hannibal should not have been snooping in Renet s private sanctum, but the instructions from Diana and Talos, and his own past experience, had suggested it as a likely place to begin his search.

There was something under the clandestine weapon. Hannibal picked up the long, enameled tile, and studied the scene of bast and serpent together opening — or closing -- the floodgate of what appeared to be an irrigation channel. From their formalized stances on the bridge, it appeared to be a ritual. The hieroglyphs above and below them might be the explanation -- but he couldn't read them. Maybe Ashur or Tanis...

The tile! It's the tile! The Guardian and the Map Room... This is what completes them, what they looked for so long to find... Renet's been involved in something nefarious from the beginning. More evidence. He must've killed Shari -- and he must be the one who tried to kill Minerva. Sands of Kobol, I wonder what other mischief he's been up to? And could he have brought other mischief-makers besides this one?

Hannibal studied the weapon's not-quite-full charge. Disturbed, he packed the items from the pit into his shoulder pouch, and left.

* * * * *

The sun was climbing, and it was getting unbearably hot. With the rescue complete, work continued around the area of the broken dome and the well several levels below. All the personnel involved were now extremely dishevelled. Some were hot and sweaty, having spent the morning in the direct light of the bloated sun; several of the others were soaking wet, drying in the heat after being pulled from the cistern. Doctor Lupus had taken the four dazed members of the mapping party away for treatment, and wanted Lucas for examination of several welts on his legs and around his waist. Lieutenant Lavanna, in her capacity as med tech, treated the minor scrapes and bruises of the rest. Fortunately, there had been no serious injuries among the Colonials this time, unlike earlier that morning. Those techs who could do so unseen by their superiors hunkered in the scant shadows of the still-standing chimney and in the cool dirt of their own trench.

The clouds scudding over the western horizon should've presaged a cooling front, but Gaius didn't see it that way. As he spoke to Captain Diana, personnel clustered around them, rousing from their apathy with enough curiosity to listen with some interest. "The storm is coming, Captain," he warned her. "A few days, and this place could be howling with winds and buried under sand dunes like nothing we've seen here yet." He sounded eager for the storm's arrival.

"Your advice, meteorologist? For the good of our expedition?" Diana tried to be cool, although she was thoroughly irritated by both the planet and Tanis's snort of derision at Gaius's enthusiasm.

"Evacuate. We can't stay here through that. We can always come back after it's passed, and I'll certainly want instruments to record its ferocity. We'll have to set those up. But I wouldn't leave any personnel here to face the brunt of that storm."

"Not even volunteers?"

"Not even a madman like you, Tanis."

The Captain sighed, brushing away limp strands of hair that kept falling into her eyes. The sentiologist looked unhappy at the prospect of abandoning his site, but uncertain how to prevent

it. The other personnel, both wet and dry, shifted quietly as their flame-haired and fiery-tempered Captain studied the site and the sky.

Before anyone could frame a reply or ask further questions of the intense scientist, Sergeant Wilson pelted up to Diana. "Captain! Renet's breaking cordon security!"

"What?" I don't need this!

"Sentiologist Renet! He grabbed a couple of techs and a land ram, and headed off into the desert! Said he was going to the Amphitheatre!" The man caught his breath. "I tried to stop him, but he wouldn't listen! Kept raving about some giant snake that took Ashur, and he had to leave right away."

"Ashur? A giant snake took him?" Dread replaced her anger. Tanis saw a snake out there. Something huge that could mesmerize a man. It took Ashur? Morgan, are you there, too? Is there really something on this planet that can take men away? Why? What could it possibly want from us?

Wilson shook his head. "I took a quick look around, asked about him. The last anyone saw of him, a few centars ago, he was heading toward the desert with Renet."

"So it could be true," she said faintly. "Maybe there are giant snakes out there..."

Tanis turned pale, but there was rage in his expression. "He's got no business going out there! And if there're snakes out in the desert..."

"Tanis!" Diana snapped. "Please! Renet took a party to the Amphitheatre? Who was in it? How long ago did they leave?"

"Just a few centons. I came right here. He took Selina, Aset, and Palmer. It was like he was obsessed, Captain. He wasn't even listening to me..."

"We've got to go after him," Tanis began aggressively.

"No one breaks security!" Oisin barked. "Not now. I'm taking a Security team after him..."

The head of the expedition stared at the relative newcomer. Things are happening too fast. No one's listening to me any more!

"I just spoke with Captain Hannibal. There's evidence Sentiologist Renet is responsible for the death of Technician Shari, and perhaps other crimes here on the surface. I'm investigating, as is my responsibility, you may recall, in this security situation," he concluded with some degree of arrogance.

Other crimes? Lords of Kobol, Morgan...? "Not alone..." Diana began.

"Of course not. I'll take several of my men," Oisin assured her.

"No," she replied decisively. "I'll accompany you. Get Hannibal. Wilson, inform Talos he's in command here for the duration..."

"Right away, ma'am." He started to leave, then hesitated, waiting for more.

"Now, wait a centon, Captain..."

"This is my expedition, Captain, and if we've got a murderer here, I want to know about it. With one of my people missing, and another deliberately injured, I am naturally concerned."

"But..." The man's face was flushed; he was fuming.

"No problem, Captain Oisin. You're doing your duty admirably," -- oh, the words hurt! -- "but I must insist on being present for this investigation."

"As you wish, Captain," he forced through stiff lips with as much courtesy as he could manage.

"Captain!" Tanis chimed in urgently. "It's my site; I know the way, I know what the place looks like..."

She glared coldly. "I've been there, too, Tanis, as have Hannibal and others."

"Dammit, woman! I've got a right to go! If he's responsible for sabotage around the city, I want to see what he might be doing out there!"

"All right, all right! Come on, then!" she replied in disgust.

"Captain, the storm..." Gaius interrupted.

"I haven't forgotten! Wilson, tell Captain Talos to prepare for the evacuation of this site on a centon's notice. Every shelter, every piece of equipment. We'll spend the night in tents if it's safe to remain here another night, or if we don't return before dusk..." Her words trailed away with her footsteps. Warriors and civilians fell meekly into step behind her.

* * * * *

Morgan trailed one of the serpents through a high, arched corridor, easily keeping his footing on the smooth, curved floor. The snake's undulations made scarcely a rustle against the clean stone.

He knew where they were going -- the council chamber of the Elder serpents. That massive cavern dwarfed the chamber where Tanis and Freya had found Bors surrounded by smaller snakes early in the expedition. The memory made him nervous. They'd been examining the humans even then. He wondered if they would be called to account for the thousands Tanis and Diana had incinerated that first day, travelling on foot to the city's location from their original landing site.

You are preoccupied.

"Just thinking." He deliberately spoke aloud. He was comfortable among the natives of Byzel, and they seemed at ease with his presence. Maybe it was time to remind them that he was one of the humans.

Of your fellows.

"Yes." Stay out of my mind when you know I want to be alone with my thoughts!

As you wish. The thought was accompanied by a dry rustle -- an indication of humour, with an overtone of apology.

A few moments later, man and serpent paused in the stone-capped cathedral-like entrance. Moonlight filtered in from hidden vents, gleaming off the silver glory of the snake's scales and

turning the man's fair hair to gold. Morgan stepped forward; he was the one summoned.

It has been arranged, he "heard" from the tremendous mind of the Eldest. It reared its triangular head, as long as the man was tall, and let obsidian eyes settle on him. He steadily faced the void in those orbs.

"What has been arranged?" he asked. He sensed an undercurrent of shock from their combined minds that he broke silence in a hallowed place that had never heard human speech. Always before, he'd respected their silence and communicated telepathically, although his efforts were almost child-like compared to the skills of these ancient creatures, especially working in unison.

A challenge has been delivered. The combatants gather even now. You and the other will wish to join them.

"The other?" Morgan glanced about, uncertain for the first time.

He sensed a human presence, and realized one of his own people was present. A moment later, he saw Ashur walk into the moonlight from another tunnel. His eyes were vacant; the sentiologist never said a word.

"Ashur?"

He walked past. As Morgan caught his arm, the man turned dazed, terrified eyes on him. The Warrior simultaneously felt something ease into his mind.

"What are you doing?" he demanded, whirling to face the Elder Council. "What have you done to him?"

We have done nothing harmful to him. What we do now is necessary to protect our planet and her peoples. We bring the storm to send your alien ways back to your ships; the other sandstorm we sent as warning you did not seem to comprehend.

You are not like the humans who were here once before. They lived amongst us in peace. But it is long millennia since they died; perhaps your kind has evolved badly. You are no longer welcome. Take our message to the Meeting Place.

One there will not leave, but that is not of our doing; the challenge is to determine which. Let them settle their quarrel here; it will be more peaceful later for the rest of you. Those who go with them... Your own actions will be your fate. Now listen, and we will tell you what more is needful for you to know, of our peoples and our past...

He couldn't resist the will of the ancient telepaths; gently but firmly, they overrode his wishes. He would carry their challenge and whatever message they had for the humans, against his own will. He and Ashur listened obediently.

* * * * *

Something cold and unwelcoming blew in the wind that gusted about the base. There was a...scent, perhaps, in the gale that they'd never noticed before. It hurried them like the baleful crack of a taskmaster's whip. The humans shuddered despite the overwhelming heat, while their temporary commander stared gravely into the wind, wondering anxiously how his friends were doing in their race to capture Renet.

They're crossing open desert. The wind must be driving them crazy, with the wild sand currents

it's stirring up. Disturbed, Talos made his way to the edge of the site, passing scurrying techs and Warriors, all gathering equipment and taking down shelters and temporary labs. At Gaius's station, near Renet's sanctum, he found several of his people, impatiently waiting for the meteorologist to finish his measurements and observations.

"What's holding you up, Gaius?" the Captain demanded, trying vainly to hold fair hair off his forehead; the wind promptly whipped it free and lashed his eyes to stinging tears. "I wanted your equipment -- and you -- back at base five centons ago!"

The dark-haired man was agitated. "Captain, you've got to let me continue with this experiment, and leave instruments to record the storm!"

"He's been saying that for the past centar!" Alexandra grumbled, squinting against the increasing winds. Lieutenant Gregory, the Sergeant's wing-mate, folded his arms in satisfaction, certain the recalcitrant scientist would now comply.

"Why?"

"Look at these readings!"

"They don't mean anything to me, Gaius. Explain them -- quickly."

"This storm's not natural!"

"What?" the exasperated Warrior demanded, staring at the data, trying to determine what might be unnatural about them.

"The storm, sir. It's increasing power at an impossible level!" He had to raise his voice to be heard against the rising violence of the weather. "See this line? No known natural phenomena can change that rapidly! Something's feeding this weather pattern, guiding it!"

"On this world? Impossible! We'd've have detected such power usage long ago!"

Gaius shook his head. "It's happening, Captain. And I want to know why! And how! And what happens when it hits! The possible significance..."

"Lords of Kobol, what's that?" Gregory yelled.

The others stared as he pointed. Alexandra gasped. She and Talos both grabbed their lasers as the apparition rose out of the sand. Gaius merely gaped in awe.

The serpent was bigger than anything any of them had ever seen before. Its head rose higher into the air on the massive, coiled body, while dark eyes studied the humans intently.

"Now I know what a microbe feels like under a microscope," Gregory breathed.

Something ripped into their minds, and the four humans collapsed without another thought.

A small fluttering something threw itself at one of the monstrous creature's eyes. It blinked once, then reached gently to the tiny flying serpent; Thorn was barely the length of the fallen woman's hand.

So, here is one of those who left the Place of Origin, so long ago. Your bravery is noted, small kinsman, but your concern is unnecessary. We will not harm these beings, but what must happen to


joan
hanke-
woods
'86

them will happen. Come to the Meeting Place with me.

Across the Colonial encampment, the humans found their attention seized for a fraction of a micron by a force they had no knowledge or comprehension of, then oblivion claimed them, one by one.

* * * * *

"There it is!"

Diana got her second glimpse of the structure Tanis called the Amphitheatre. She was again impressed by its lonely grandeur and vast size. The ruin, like a long patrol through empty, star sprinkled space, gave her a sense of smallness, of being only the most miniscule part of a huge and diversified galaxy. It was generally not a comforting thought. On this alien world, it was even less so.

The land ram closed rapidly on the huge pillars that rose above the deep bowl in the sand. Another Colonial vehicle was parked there, and Diana could hear Tanis swearing behind her.

A sudden gust of sand-swirling wind threw itself against their land ram's front port, and her thoughts were forgotten as she strove to blindly manoeuvre the small craft against that push. The machine coughed as grit filtered into its engines, then caught again and pushed gamely on. In a few moments, the wind died away again, and the Captain could see they were nearly beside the other vehicle. She parked gratefully. It had not been a pleasant trip.

Tanis was muttering again.

"Stop worrying," Oisin grumbled. "I'll have him arrested in a few centons, and you'll have your precious site all to yourself!"

"I'd rather deal with him personally!" the sentiologist returned darkly. "There are matters between us that need resolving."

"Fine. I'll bury him, and arrest you!"

The handful of Warriors and the lone civilian spilled out of their vehicle and trudged as rapidly as possible toward the entry pillars of the Amphitheatre. The ground seemed softer than before; their feet sank into the drifted sand ridges as they walked.

Hannibal hung back a moment. "You're concerned about the rumours of huge snakes around here, aren't you, Diana?"

She studiously avoided his gaze. "I'm beginning to wonder if they might not be true. And I'm concerned about Morgan."

"It's been almost three sectons since he wandered off. You believe he's still alive somehow?"

"I have to believe that!" she insisted. "Let's go, before Tanis and Oisin kill each other, and Renet escapes."

"Where'll he escape to?"

Diana ignored that piece of logic, and strode toward the arena. But she stopped when she saw the scene spread out before her.

A bast suddenly streaked between her feet, and vanished into the shadows behind one of the pillars. It escaped her attention, although Hannibal found it one more eerie disturbance; there shouldn't be such creatures living out here, unless they'd brought one on the ram somehow...

Down the wide steps, at centre stage, the renegade sentiologist stood as if transfixed, staring up at the blank-featured cliff wall. His feet were firmly planted on the gleaming stone, and his arms were outstretched as if imploring the intercession of some nameless deity. Although sand and grit blew above them in the whistling gale, within the stone walls it was perfectly still; Renet bore a disturbing similarity to a statue, as though he'd become one of the artifacts of the planet.

Three civilian techs clustered to one side, on the first row of seats. Their nervous gestures and glances became more pronounced as they noticed the Security men and their expedition leader resolutely approaching them. Uneasily, they stood and climbed several of the terraced steps to be farther from the fireworks sure to occur.

Renet abruptly wheeled to face the newcomers. His face glowed with discovery, and his eyes held a wild gleam of fanaticism. "It is here, Tanis," he hissed. "Here is the secret of Byzel, not that dome you have wasted your time with. This is where the ancients ones came; this is their holy place. They have taken Morgan and Ashur, but they will not take me. I have been given the key to all they were. I will unlock their secrets, and Byzel will be mine forever!"

Oisin's people stepped back as if repulsed, looking confused.

Tanis was more direct in his conclusion. "You're crazy, Renet!"

"Think what you will, Tanis. Your name will be forgotten as if buried beneath these sands for twenty millennia. Yes, that is how long it has been since the last humans lived and died on this world. Twenty millennia, Tanis, since Byzel lived and died -- but this place has always been alive, then and now. I have found it. I will give it life. And for this triumph, this restoration of life to a dead world, my name will survive with it, symbolizing our profession and our link of past to present and future! They will place my name in the heavens for all to see, and remember, and respect!"

Tanis's stare lasted only a moment before he concluded the other man was, indeed, dangerously insane. "Yes, they'll remember your thievery, and the discredit you've been to our profession! But maybe they'll forgive you for your mental state. Captain, arrest him!"

Captain Oisin stepped forward alone; his men held back. "Sentiologist Renet, I am here to take you into custody for questioning concerning the murder of Technician Shari and the attempted murder of Sergeant Minerva..."

"No!" Renet pulled a laser from somewhere in his loose-fitting robes and pointed it at the Security Captain. He fired before the man could react. The stunned officer toppled to the stone platform.

"No one moves!" the sentiologist warned, waving the purloined weapon.

The gathered Colonials froze as the laser swept over them. The civilian's eyes moved faster than the gun; he somehow seemed to have them all in his sights at all times.

"That is better. Soon, soon, the secret will be revealed. The sun is setting; soon the Amphitheatre will come to life. You will see; you will see..."

Tanis was within reach, with no protection. Renet's gaze fastened on him with a kind of greed and cunning. "But you, Tanis, you will not see it. I have had enough of you to last me a lifetime. You should never have crossed me. You should never have set yourself up against me. Perhaps when you have spent twenty thousand yahrens under this sand and stone, you will come to see that."

The pale, grim sentiologist let his hand slide to the handle of the whip at his belt. "You're mad," he stated flatly, hoping for a diversion.

Renet's smile came slowly. He aimed, allowing the rest of the humans to move away or hide as they would. "As I told Shari, you should have understood..."

Tanis's favourite weapon lashed out with a crack, wrapping around the laser and jerking it from the other man's hand. Renet screamed in outrage, then threw himself at his rival. Whip and laser flew off to one side. Snarling, Tanis closed for a fight.

Diana, Hannibal, and the pair of non-Security Warriors accompanying them went for their weapons. But before the laser pistols could be drawn, something froze them in their tracks.

No. Leave them to settle their feud.

At the entrance to the Amphitheatre, between the two tallest columns, stood two human males, Lieutenant Morgan and Epigraphist Ashur. They flanked a snake like none Diana had ever seen before. It was huge, its head as long as the men on either side of it were tall. Its coppery gleam blindingly reflected the red sun.

"Morgan?"

As the man appraised the scene, his eyes seemed to linger on her a single centon, then pass on. She shuddered under that cold gaze. Something's happened to him!

The only people seemingly unaffected by the silent words of command were Renet and Tanis. They grappled on the stone floor beneath the emotionless gaze of the bleary setting sun, while the mesmerized humans watched in horror.

Diana's fists clenched slowly as she struggled to form words. "What...are you...doing? Why...? Morgan...stop this!"

If the man noticed her attempt to speak to him, he gave no response beyond a flicker of surprise. There was nothing else he could do; he was only the serpent s mouthpiece.

The older Captain Hannibal, consciously relaxing every other muscle, forced his fingers to clamp on the butt of his laser, but couldn't draw it out to fire. He was as helpless as the rest, for all his yahrens of varied experiences. Ashur and Morgan walked past him, dispassionately staring toward the stage. He couldn't get their attention.

The watching serpent reared higher, as though to get a better look at the combat. It found the single-minded blood-lust of the humans repugnant, but forced itself to reach into their minds, to feel their emotions and try to understand them. It was interested in far more than just the two struggling men. It touched the terrified, angry, panicked minds of the others, too, but returned to Tanis and Renet for another moment.

Then it withdrew, prepared to wait and pass judgement on the survivor, if there was one, for this was nothing less than a battle to the death; the sentiologists' hands were clutched brutally around one another's throats.

Tanis felt a moment of angry panic that none of his companions came to his aid. He couldn't spare the time to notice the serpent; it would only have distracted him and destroyed his spirits to see his worst nemesis apparently in league with his worst human opponent. Then his attention was totally on Renet as he realized his peril. His rival fought with the vicious fury of a madman.

Renet sensed triumph near, and his grinning face was the last sight Tanis saw as the world began to darken nightmarishly around him.

(To be concluded.)

(The end is near -- believe it or not!)



"Love Song"
(To A Viper)

(By Karen Klinck)

So sleek and beautiful you stand,
Proud and graceful. At my command
You streak, swift as starlight,
Reaching to touch hope in the night.

Given unto my trust,
You're responsive to my slightest touch;
No other responds to my needs
Like you.

I pledge anew,
Each time we fly,
You and I,
My faith in you.

And few there are, and far between,
Who understand that you are the queen
And mistress of of my life.
No other, be it lord of strife,
Or lady dear, or friend, or foe,
Can bid us stay, when 'tis time to go.

And when, at last, our time is gone --
A fiery ball. We'll still be one.

FROM DEEP SPACE...

In May of 1985, several fans gathered at MediaWest*Con V for a panel on the merits -- or lack thereof -- of V: THE SERIES and its place in media fandom. One of the things brought out during the ensuing discussion was the logical connection between that series and BATTLESTAR GALACTICA. After all, we know from Captain Apollo that the Cylons were created by a race of reptiles, who were then presumably destroyed through the efforts of their mechanical creations. We also know from V (the mini-series, that is) that the Visitors, a reptilian race, had an implacable enemy that was out to eliminate them. The tie-in seemed obvious.

Following that panel, the editor of PURPLE AND ORANGE? was approached by two intrepid writers who wanted to create a series of cross-universe stories (specifically, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA/V); these would also include references to a number of California-based television series, with "guest appearances" in the stories by some of the characters from those programs.

Needless to say, we were at first not overly enthusiastic about the idea. If nothing else, it would involve another on-going series. With "Why Did It Have to Be...?" drawing to a long-awaited conclusion and "Allies" being revised for publication as a complete novel some time in 1987, we were not at all certain we wanted to begin another such lengthy project. And cross-universe stories seldom turn out well.

But we were <u>bribed</u>! (Yes, it seems we <u>do</u> have a price...) The two instigators of this ambitious little project offered to take on most of the work involved in producing PURPLE AND ORANGE? Since one of them was already our Assistant Editor and has proven to be quite skilled, and the other was an eager and enthusiastic (to say nothing of dependable!) editorial assistant, we gave the suggestion serious consideration.

The result is in your hands.

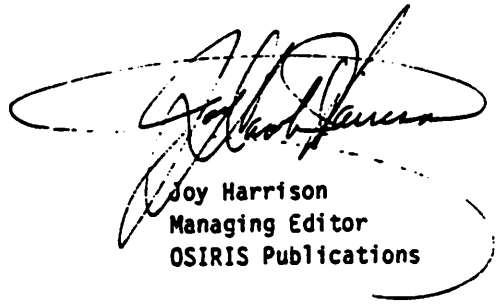
Effective with this issue -- Issue #19 -- of PURPLE AND ORANGE?, Sharon Monroe of Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, has taken over the editorial reins of this fanzine, with the able assistance of J. D. Rich of Northbrook, Illinois. We have assumed the formal position of Managing Editor of OSIRIS Publications.

What does this mean for <u>you</u>, the fans? Simply that Sharon and J. D. will be doing most of the production work involved with this fanzine, while we remain in a supervisory capacity. We will continue to edit most of the novels from OSIRIS Publications and will have final approval of all material for PURPLE AND ORANGE? -- but we won't have to do so much of the work! And <u>that</u> means more time for us to do our own writing.

Editing PURPLE AND ORANGE? for nearly seven years, ever since ABC-TV announced the cancellation of BATTLESTAR GALACTICA and we were asked to "help" (!) with an unpretentious little "one-shot" (!!) fanzine, has been a truly rewarding experience, one we would not willingly have missed. We have enjoyed meeting and working with so many skilled amateur writers and artists, and have been delighted over the years by how much they -- and <u>we</u> -- have learned and improved. And we have truly enjoyed meeting so many of our readers and fellow fans...

Of course, we have absolutely no intention of totally giving up something we have enjoyed so much. You will still be seeing us at science fiction conventions, and will still be addressing all orders and correspondence for PURPLE AND ORANGE? to the OSIRIS Publications mailing address. And we will continue to write this column for each issue of PURPLE AND ORANGE?

We sincerely hope you will enjoy all of the changes and improvements we have planned for PURPLE AND ORANGE? in the months and years anead. And we look forward to seeing and hearing from all of you, as we have so often in the past.



Joy Harrison
Managing Editor
OSIRIS Publications



Scorecard: Wha' Happ'n, Mon?

We have been informed, in no uncertain terms, by Ye Olde Managing Editor (to be read in Olde English script, if you please), that we are to prepare an explanation (justification?) for a story commencing in this issue, entitled "Survive the Alliance," and the fact that we are now Editor of PURPLE AND ORANGE? (The two incidents <u>are</u> related.) The explanation? Simple. We took a dare. And she meant it.

Insufficient?

We'll try again.

At MediaWest*Con V, last May, a panel was held to discuss the relative merits of V: THE SERIES. During the course of that panel, it was pointed out that there were a number of plausible connections between that television series and another, many years cancelled, called BATTLESTAR GALACTICA. A small group of die-hards continued that discussion late into the night...

Wha'da'ya'mean? Of <u>course</u> we were sober! Hmmph!

Major arguments. The Cylons were created by a reptilian race long ago, which then apparently became extinct, according to Captain Apollo. It is possible, considering the apparent nature of the Cylons, that they turned on and exterminated their creators. The reptilian Visitors needed raw materials and food supplies to continue a battle against an implacable foe of long stancing -- perhaps a self-created enemy? The Visitors refer to their supreme commander as the "Leader." To the Cylons, he (she? it?) is referred to as "Imperious Leader." A coincidence, or a common past?

As the discussion continued, it occurred to someone that there were enough connecting points to make a very interesting and even plausible cross-universe tale. Our very irreverent Editorial Assistant (hereafter referred to as Ed.Ass.) suggested that characters from several other California-based series, such as AIRWOLF, KNIGHT RIDER, REMINGTON STEELE and THE A-TEAM could participate in the action.

A medley of chuckles accompanied by demented grins broke forth. An outline took shape. A universe was born. The hours passed...

In the morning, we presented the idea to Ye Olde Managing Editor, who was less than thrilled...

"Cross-universe stories don't work."

This one will.

"I won't publish it!"

Even if it's good?

"If it's good, I'll consider it. But you'll have to do the rest of the zine!"

No problem, we said, not really believing her.

How little we knew... We took her words as a threat, and a challenge. We would write the story, and it would be so good she'd have to publish it. Ed.Ass. and ourselves completed the first episode, and submitted it to Ye Olde Managing Editor. She glared. She read it. She smiled sweetly and handed us the material for the next issue.

"#19 comes out in February. Get working."

You meant it?

"Of course! Maybe now I'll get some time for my own writing..."

That's how it happened. And now here we are. As has been said many times before, in many ways, it's not our fault!

The result of that convention's kibbitzing begins in this issue of PURPLE AND ORANGE?, on page 54. The basic premise is simple. GALACTICA reaches Earth -- and finds the shining planet occupied by the Visitors. The Visitors are fighting the Cylons. The Cylons picked up the same signals as our intrepid Colonials, and are now closing on Earth as well. The Cylons hate everybody. The Visitors and the Colonials have no reason to trust each other. The Earth humans have no reason to trust anybody -- either the Visitors or their space-going brothers (another trick?).

Get the picture? It's a universe of our media favourites. If he/she/it appears on television or in the movies, he/she/it could appear in "Survive the Alliance." And it's not a private playground -- there's lots of room for you and your creations. Wide open. For just about anything and anybody. You're welcome to join us there. As long as it works, and there's a reasonable explanation for it. (Authors' and editors' discretion, of course. We have a vested interest in the quality of the universe.)

Oh, the title? There's a line a BATTLESTAR GALACTICA (the movie), as the humans evacuate the Colonies and head for Carillon, in which Commander Adama states, "The human race might have one more chance, but first it would have to survive the alliance, the elements, and the unknown dark and sinister threats which would lie ahead." (By the time this story's done, those "dark and sinister threats" may look like a high school dance -- not so bad, in retrospect.)

So here's the scorecard for the first episode, "Journeys End In...", listing all characters and their primary universe. (Original creations in lower-case.)

ADAMA	Colonial; commander of escaped Fleet (BG)
APOLLO	Colonial Warrior; captain; Adama's son (BG)
ARCHANGEL	Terran; superviser for The Firm, an intelligence agency (Airwolf)
ATHENA	Colonial; lieutenant; Adama's daughter; bridge officer (BG)
BALTAR	Colonial traitor; commander of Cylon attack force (BG)
BATES, KYLE	Terran; Resistance member; human lover of Elizabeth Maxwell (V)
BATES, NATHAN	Terran; Kyle's deceased father; former owner of Science Frontiers; negotiated with Diana (V)
BOOMER	Colonial Warrior; lieutenant (BG)
CAITLIN	Terran; member of Santini Air (Airwolf)
CHARLES	Visitor nobleman; poisoned after marriage to Diana (V)
DIANA	Visitor scientist; would have Alexis Colby for breakfast; traitor to the Leader; power-hungry; former commander of Los Angeles Mother Ship (V)
DONOVAN, MICHAEL	Terran; journalist and member of the Resistance; referred to as "Gooder" for his ethical standards (V)
DONOVAN, SEAN	Terran; Michael's son; member of Visitor Youth Corps (V)
Douglas	Visitor; loyal to Diana and instrumental in her escape
FARBER, CHRIS	Terran; mercenary; member of the Resistance (V)
HAWKE, STRINGFELLOW	Terran; pilot for Santini Air; test pilot for Airwolf, an experimental helicopter with vroom (Airwolf)
JAMES	Visitor Lieutenant; Diana's lover and enforcement arm; no scruples and lots of ambition (V)
LEADER	Visitor Supreme Commander; comes to Earth to make peace and take Elizabeth Maxwell as his consort; extraordinary psionic powers -- actual appearance unknown (V)
LYDIA	Visitor Security Commander; enemy to Diana for personal reasons; loyal to the Leader (V)
MARTIN	Visitor; fifth columnist murdered by Diana (V)
MAXWELL, ELIZABETH	Terran-Visitor hybrid; known as the Starchild -- gifted with psychic abilities; chosen as consort for the Leader (V)
MAYLAND, STEVE	Terran scientist; former lover of Julie (V)

OMEGA	Colonial; flight officer on GALACTICA (BG)
PARRISH, JULIET	Terran; scientist and member of the Resistance; responsible for re-establishment of Science Frontiers (V)
PHILIP	Inspector General of the Visitors; in charge of Visitor forces; Martin's brother; fifth columnist (V)
RAMAN	Legendary Visitor warrior; festival in his honour includes bloody sacrifice of young officers; his descendants are still revered (V)
SANTINI, DOMINIC	Terran; owner of Santini Air and helicopter pilot (Airwolf)
STARBUCK	Colonial Warrior; lieutenant; reputation for luck (BG)
TIGH	Colonial officer; Executive officer and Adama's friend (BG)
TYLER, HAM	Terran; mercenary; member of Resistance; reputation for ruthlessness and few scruples -- he ll do what needs doing (V)
WILLIE	Visitor trooper; fifth columnist; has difficulties with the English language (V)

Those are the players in this episode. And next time... Well, you'll have to wait and see.

Speaking of next time, Issue #20 of PURPLE AND ORANGE? is slotted for publication this May, to coincide with MediaWest*Con VI (a.k.a. 6, six, hex, sechs...). In this special issue, you can look for: another episode of "Survive the Alliance," in which Lydia meets a Colonel who gives as good as he gets, and Starbuck has a close encounter with a modified Trans-Am; the conclusion (finally!) of "Why Did It Have to Be...?" -- thumbs down at the arena, and the humans have hades to pay; a "Party" on the OSIRIS, and the Cylons accept the invitation; "Starbuck's Lady" -- not exactly someone he can bring home to mother; as a special treat, you'll take a ride on the "Battlestar HIROSHIMA"; "And If Thou Wilt" -- Wilt what? Who wilt? And why?; plus more of the usual lunacy and excitement.

(You probably figured the lunacy. But it's been several long weeks, and we're in a rather lunatic mood. Forgive us.)

OSIRIS Publications will also premiere THE SONIC SCREWDRIVER, a new Dr. Who fanzine, for MediaWest*Con. We thought the project was dead, but, like P&O?, it seems to have taken on a life of its own. After announcing the cancellation of the publication, we received a sudden avalanche of submissions! We'll need your opinions before we decide if we should continue publishing SONIC SCREWDRIVER on a yearly basis (perhaps to coincide with WorldCon? "Brighton in '67 wouldn't be a bad place for SS#2...). If you wish to submit for this new Who-zine, our usual standards for art, fiction, non-fiction, and poetry are applicable.

Sharon Monroe

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